

## Caption transcript for the

### “Supporting the Wellbeing of Neurodiverse Colleagues” online workshop

**(Disclaimer: We have endeavoured to make this transcript as true to the original audio as possible. However, please be aware that there may be some inconsistencies / misinterpretations of text which you will need to take into account)**

Hello everybody, Hello and welcome to our first make a difference webinar for 2021, which is focused on supporting the wellbeing needs of neurodiverse colleagues.

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Claire Farrow. I'm the global director of content for Make A Difference Media and I also look after the content for the MAD World Summit.

We've been delighted to work in collaboration with DMA talent on this webinar, and with the kind sponsorship of Texthelp.

We've had a tremendous response, with nearly 600 attendees registered from the UK and further afield which is absolutely phenomenal. And we want the session to be as interactive as possible so we've included a couple of polls, and we encourage you to send in your questions. And if you could use the q & a button at the bottom of your screen to do that, rather than the chat function. We've also enabled captions.

If you can't see these, go to the live transcript button, which is on the menu bar at the bottom of your screen and you press show subtitle.

We've got some fantastic speakers lined up for the session. Matthew Trerise and Angela Armstrong will introduce themselves to you shortly. And we're also delighted to be joined in the second half of the session by Stuart Blair from Texthelp, and Caroline Eglinton, who is Access and Inclusion Manager with the diversity and inclusion team at Network Rail. Caroline is going to share a case study of how Network Rail is supporting the wellbeing of neurodiverse colleagues.

So with no further ado, over to Matthew and Angela so that they can introduce themselves and explain the format of the webinar.

#### **Matthew:**

Thanks very much. I'm just gonna share my screen, a second for everybody.

There we go. I hope everybody can see that and hear me clearly. Welcome, everyone. Thanks so much for joining us today. There's been an unbelievable response to putting this workshop out as Claire mentioned and we're really really pleased to be working in collaboration with mad world, and with DMA talent to deliver this for you. And just to introduce myself. So yeah, my name is Matthew Trerise.

I spend most of my time working in the NHS four days a week. In a busy active diagnostic service in Bristol for adults on the autism spectrum. We provide diagnostic assessment and post diagnostic support services, this is all happening remotely at the moment and just in the context of lockdown it poses particular challenges trying to operate a remote NHS service.

I'm doing this outside of my NHS role today. And, it's really good to be talking to a group of employers about the wellbeing around neurodiversity. We've been working with DMA Talent for the last couple of years as part of their diversity initiative delivering workshops to employers.

Let me hand over to Angela now for her to introduce herself before we kick off properly.

#### **Angela:**

Hello. So, yes, I'm Angela Armstrong, I've got a background in leading national transformational change programs for corporate and public sector clients. I'm an executive coach with over 10 years experience working with leaders at all levels on mindset and behavior change to maximize performance.

For the last 10 years I have been running my own learning and development consultancy to develop leaders who can deliver sustainable high performance and collaborating with Matt and others to promote inclusion is something I'm passionate about, not least because I also happen to be autistic.

On the slide you can see that DMA Talent are leading the way with raising awareness of neurodiversity, and they have two excellent employer guides available on their website with another one on ADHD due out soon.

[These are links to two of DMA Talent's guides:

[Dyslexia Employer Guide](#)

[Autism Employer Guide](#)

So as Matt said we're delighted we've got so many people on the call today. And we're going to therefore start with an explanation of neurodiversity, and in particular those dimensions of difference that help to inform an effective wellbeing strategy.

Items one to five on the agenda are as per your invite so we're going to be answering those questions for you. And then handing over to Stuart from Texthelp to cover the assistive technology.

So a little bit of theory first, followed by some practical solutions.

Before we get started, we would like to see how much you already know about neurodiversity, so, here's a question.

If we asked you to explain neurodiversity nonstop, without repeating yourself, how long could you confidently talk for? James is going to put the poll up for us. Thank you, James.

We'll be able to come back to the answers in a moment.

So that will just help to inform how much time we spend on the explanation piece. And I'm going to hand over to Matt to kick us off with understanding neurodiversity.

**Matthew:**

Thanks Angela.

So firstly, in terms of terminology, we know that there are very differing views and opinions on how we should refer to the subject. For today we're choosing to use the term neurodiversity.

Now it's just worth recognizing that this is a huge subject to do justice to in a very short amount of time, and there's a huge amount of diversity within neurodiversity itself, so it's unlikely that we will be able to cover everything today. But we will absolutely do our best.

And just for a bit of explanation for people who don't have a huge knowledge of the subject.

Yeah, as it says on the slide neurodiversity is the concept that brain differences are normal and appear as a result of normal variations in the human genome. Think about, kind of hard wiring differences.

Whether you're left-handed or right - it is absolutely a small genetic difference but the term neurodiversity, often related to neurodevelopmental conditions. Specifically, autism ADHD dyslexia dyspraxia dyscalculia, Tourette syndrome.

And the point here is,

[I'm sorry. Can I interrupt you slightly getting a lot of comments about can you just adjust your mic, because it's popping. Apologies. Is that any better? I can try and take it off if it's getting quite a bit of feedback from it. Oh, gosh, I'm ready so is that any better. Can you hear me? Okay, that sounds better. Yeah. We are recording the session so lots of you have asked that yes it will be available after. Sorry to interrupt you, Matthew]

That's quite all right. We want this to be as glitch free as possible and it's the world of online presenting. What I'd give to be in a big MADWorld auditorium right now talking to everybody.

Okay so, so yeah like I say, neurodiversity is often discussed in relation to neurodevelopmental conditions. And the point here is we're talking about hardwiring differences in the brain. And that will fundamentally change people's experience of the world. And, you know the public has often considered people with neurodevelopmental conditions, as people with disabilities, and this is all about changing the narrative, which we're going to get into in more detail in a second.

Neurodiversity activists reject the idea that conditions like autism should be cured, advocating instead for celebrating different ways of communicating, different ways of being and self expression, and promoting support systems that will allow people to live as themselves and be themselves rather than having to fit into a neurotypical world.

And just moving on, diagnosis is made using the medical model of disability and again this is all about kind of changing the narrative and I think this is really important because the diagnosis for all neurodevelopmental conditions is made by people meeting, essentially a negative symptoms. And this is how it's often been presented to the world. Cognitive explanations are very, very helpful though.

And again, we must change the narrative around this. When we talk about cognitive differences we'll get into this in more detail and it's a huge subject in itself, but essentially we're talking about our executive functioning - the planning and organizing part of our brain.

The way people process information, whether that be in a very detailed focused way some people might process things better, visually or auditory, or, or, in written format, you know, so everybody is wired up differently, and the point here is that the world is being created for the majority. Everything is set up for the majority, and in a kind of neurotypical way of thinking. And context is hugely important, and what might be considered a difficulty in one area could absolutely be a strength in another area, specifically with something like detail focused ways of processing.

And we'll touch on this again later, but some people who might absolutely get caught up in the detail of things will have difficulty seeing the wider context or the bigger picture in a situation. But in another context having that detail focus can be hugely advantageous when you think about problem solving or pattern recognition. So, we try and present all of this in a balanced perspective and we hope, as we go through the presentation today in the workshop today that again this feels like time well spent.

Thank you. And just a few examples of employers and industries that might be a bit ahead of the game and their thinking about neurodiversity, and this is still very new to a lot of people.

But we know that certain industries certain employers have kind of recognized the skills that people from the neurodiverse community bring to the workforce for a long time, but not just recognize the skills, are prepared to make changes to the way that they do things, specifically in relation to recruitment and, and adaptations in the workplace and organizations like GCHQ for example the Government Communications Headquarters, they've had as far as I'm aware a neurodiversity lead for the last 20 years. And these are one of the first employers that I made contact with.

Microsoft have their autism hiring program in America. And you've got organizations like Auticon, a German IT consultancy firm, who specifically recruit autistic consultants and, and the point here is again that they not only recognize the skills that people bring but have made changes to the way that they recruit.

And I think a lot of the good practice around recruitment is not using traditional job interviews for example and doing far more skills testing, informal interviews, talking to people about their interests, and not asking a bunch of hypothetical questions.

And so, this will be different for different organizations and different industries, but, but again, what I always say to employers is, if you want the skills that people bring and you want to support your workforce to get the best out of people, it is likely that that some tweaks and adaptations are going to be necessary. And thankfully, a lot of the adaptations that are made, are absolutely beneficial to everybody. We're often not talking about expensive or complicated ways of doing things.

And so, we hope that what we will end up talking about is not just reasonable adjustments but inclusive practice. And because I really can't stress that enough, the adaptations that we often make for people on the autism spectrum, for example, always make things better for everybody else.

So, let's think about this as inclusive practice and, and you shouldn't necessarily need a diagnosis or the Equalities Act to be supported properly in the workplace.

Now, we're not in the business of making diagnosis of famous people. We'd much rather talk about significant people in the world who have self-disclosed their diagnosis. There is a lot of speculation that a lot of people throughout history that have made significant contributions - made major breakthroughs in areas of their work - are likely to be, from the neurodiverse community, on the autism spectrum.

But, the point here is again that they're very successful people that are celebrated for their work and have self-disclosed to the world.

Angela Is there anything that you would like to add?

**Angela:**

Just that this is helping to overcome the stigma about the efficacy of people for those who are new to this topic.

**Matthew:**

Thank you. And apologies if it feels like we're rattling through this - we've tried to fit in a huge amount into a short amount of time.

But, cognitive explanations around neurodiversity are really helpful. And I think it's worth recognizing really, again, everybody is wired up very very differently.

And when we think about cognitive differences, people do often have very spiky profiles and, you know, within autistic people, there is a huge amount of diversity in presentation and then there's a lot of stereotypes about ways of thinking.

And, you know, in relation to people maybe needing a lot of routine and structure, having a strong preference for detail but equally I know a huge amount of people on the autism spectrum that don't need those things in place, you know. So, within neurodiversity again everybody is very, very different.

When we think about things like executive functioning. And that's relevant to a huge amount of people, and it's a bit of the brain, the frontal lobe, that does all the planning, organizing, flexible thinking, problem solving, initiation and switching attention. It can relate to impulse control as well, and, and, and that's super relevant to everybody, everyone can relate to this because some of you, whether you have a diagnosis of anything or not will have a stronger preference for things like routine and predictability than other people. Other people like to be impulsive and spontaneous. So we've all got different needs. And when we talk about kind of detailed focus, thinking versus big picture thinking there is a theory around central coherence that is helpful to describe this. Where the majority of people are kind of global processors of information and take in huge amounts of stuff, all of the time. And then your brain subconsciously or intuitively filters out details that are not relevant and allows you to see the whole or the big picture, and people with a more detailed focus might have particular skills in certain areas, but also could have a difficulty seeing the wider context or the bigger picture.

So, again, it's just really recognizing, we can't get into this in a huge amount of detail right now, but it's just really recognizing that everybody is wired differently and we can't talk in absolutes about any of this.

[Poll results: Most people say they could talk about neurodiversity non-stop for less than 10 minutes. This gives an idea of the knowledge base of the people joining the session].

Yeah, absolutely. I think that's probably reflective of the current awareness and understanding, nationally, is still very very new territory for a lot of people.

And, and we hope that you know this is a little snapshot today. We can probably talk about this for a week or on an ongoing basis, to answer the polls. I don't think you want us to talk for a week.

And anyway, back here with you guys.

**Angela**

May I interrupt you just for a moment, a number of questions about spiky profiles. Yeah. Um, do you want to explain that?

**Matthew**

Go for it.

**Angela**

Um so spiky profiles are shorthand for different capabilities, I'm going to massively oversimplify this. But what we often see is people who are neurodiverse are either absolutely fantastic at something, or completely rubbish at it, that there's less middle ground across a variety of different skills, whether that's being organized, or decisive or dealing with visual input versus verbal input versus data.

And so, it's, I guess more distinct what the strengths are and the areas that they just are not wired to do.

That's what we mean by spiky profiles.

**Matthew**

Yeah, and in relation to employment, it could be about a move away from a kind of generalist way of thinking where everybody has to be able to do everything and actually having more kind of specificity around roles or a bit of job carving might be useful, because people might excel at certain aspects of a role, but have some difficulties with other aspects so it's sort of taking that into account when you're allocating work or developing roles.

And we see this also in relation to sensory differences which Angela is going to talk a bit about later, where people are very uneven sensory profiles and will be, you know, potentially over sensitive in some areas or under sensitive and other areas so yeah have multiple senses affected so that's kind of what we're referring to. So I hope all of this makes sense. If we would do a longer session, if I was delivering autism training for example I would probably spend about two hours talking about cognitive differences. But once I go down the rabbit hole it's really hard to stop!

So we'll just leave it there, maybe questions in a bit. Yeah.

Challenges, and advantages around having cognitive differences. And some of the challenges as you can see here might be about having a very strong logical or creative bias.

We talked about ability to hyperfocus and I think is absolutely, as Angela has got on the slide, fits into both camps because hyper focus if that's about internal dialogue and rumination on particular things can be a significant challenge but equally when you think about the ability to hyperfocus on a task for example or on a detail focused task, specifically, and that can be hugely advantageous. And we know we've had reports from a lot of employers, for example, around the ability of neurodiverse colleagues to intensely focus on a task for long periods of time without making mistakes, without being distracted. But equally I know that there's a lot of people who, who might focus on the minutiae of something, if a problem has occurred for example and have a huge amount of rumination and difficulty kind of moving on from something, so again it can be an advantage in some situations and really challenging in others.

Equally as Angela explains it as 'analysis paralysis'.

If you are again very detailed focused in the way that you think there is, again, opportunity to get caught up in the minutiae of things or over ruminate on things and difficulty moving on or seeing the wider context or the bigger picture.

And when it comes to problem solving and having different hardwiring can again be hugely advantageous seeing things from a different perspective approaching things in a different way, and a huge amount of kind of creativity in relation to problem solving.

And these are all hugely advantageous things where we've put tolerance for boredom, you know I don't have a diagnosis of anything. But I do have some fairly solid ADHD traits, myself, and, in relation to our current lockdown situation, you know, I've never been so inactive in my life. And I'm frantic on my NHS role every day, but I'm strapped to a computer and the diversity of life is kind of being stripped back so I just sit here fidgeting all day and talking into the screen for eight hours and then shut my computer and then there's another apparently another day is gone, and I really felt the impact of this myself and, and I think this is again trying to present a balanced perspective on all of this. Some people are more comfortable being more sedentary or having life stripped back, other people in this current situation are likely to be struggling and

Angela, should I hand over to let you talk about some of the social aspects?

**Angela:**

Yeah, sure.

So a lot of the social aspects of how we interact are unwritten rules. They are varied, complex and fluid. And a lot of the social cues rely on processing nonverbal communication.

For example, people are generally more likely to look at their watch or start turning away from a conversation, rather than say, "we're done now, have a good day". And the lack of explicit signaling, and the heavy reliance on nonverbal communication can make social interaction problematic for some neurodiverse people.

And that's just about a prioritization of input.

And so, someone who is neuro diverse might lean more towards the words that are being said, than the non verbals. And also might be more interested in the content of the conversation. More than the experience of having an interaction, and where this often shows up, is a very low threshold for chit chatting or small talk because they're getting less from the interaction in terms of just feeling bonded and part of an engagement.

They're like, I know what the weather's like I can look out the window I just experienced it I walked across town, whatever.

There's kind of just different values put on those types of interactions. But, get them on a subject that they love, you know, go for days and days and happily interact on something like that.

So different prioritizing the empathy.

Honestly we could do a whole day on this. And it's massively stereotyped for the neurodiverse community. Some people are absolutely able to empathize emotionally with what's going on for other people.

Some people have used their adaptations so they use their 'thinking through powers', if you like, as a kind of a proxy for emotional empathy, and they think through what might the other person be doing because they're coming from a place of caring, they're just not wired in a way that allows them to use emotion as a preference over logic.

And there are still other people who do not express empathy, either with neurodiverse people or neurotypical people. Okay so again the range is enormous, and generalizations are hard work but we have to have a go to get it in this time, and emotional expression is also frequently misunderstood. So people who are neurodiverse have emotions and feelings just like everybody else. They might just express it differently, and they may be more able to kind of compartmentalize and put things in a box.

But it doesn't mean that they're not emotionally able to experience the full spectrum of emotions.

Now one that's quite interesting is facial recognition. This is actually a separate condition but it's frequently co-occurring, and why they give it a complicated name and prosopagnosia I think it is face blindness.

This means that they might struggle to recognize someone out of context.

So if you happen to bump into a colleague in the high street buying a sandwich at lunch, because they're out of context, they're not in the work setting, you might not recognize them immediately. And this, again runs a whole spectrum from not being any different to this as someone who's maybe okay or not okay at facial recognition, through to not being able to recognize yourself in a mirror. And so, again, broad spectrum, but it impacts so much on our interactivity and also our wellbeing.

So things like having to wear your name tag for security purposes is actually great if you're a neurodiverse person, because you can have a sneak look to see their name.

So some other challenges and advantages.

So, If some have these different priorities, and abilities, to read nonverbal communications and pick up social clues requires. If someone wants to come across as being more neurotypical, they're doing an awful lot more work.

And basically, they're playing a role of being a more neurotypical presenting person. And we call that masking, and often that is as a result of having been bullied, you know as a child, for being so different, they figured out how they have to show up in order to fit in somehow. But don't

underestimate the amount of effort that that takes in terms of interviewing and so on when we're looking at someone might be a fabulous, values fit.

But this nebulous culture fit, of how we do things around here might not match, that doesn't mean they can't add massive value they just show up in a slightly different way.

So as long as their capability and the underlying values are good, then, we may have to take a broader look at what cultural fit means. Office politics requires an untold amount of nuance and if you're working hard to even interact in a more neurotypical way, generally haven't got any effort or energy to apply yourself to office politics.

And the same is true of lying which is a very conscious activity, and we'll get onto radical honesty. It's just that society is not always ready for a straight answer to a straight question.

And one of the ways that I kind of play with this and make fun with it is, you know, my friends, no longer enjoy shopping with me and I don't get invited which is fine because I don't like shopping anyway.

But the classic if they turn around and say "hey, does my bum look big in this". I'm more likely to say "yes, actually it does, but that other outfit was much better". They know that they will get a straight answer.

All of these differences in styles of communication can mean that it takes a bit longer to establish a relationship. And because of that amount of effort involved, the neurodiverse community quite often has a smaller social support network. Again, generalizations.

There's a flip side anyway. Some of the advantages are, if you are less bothered about what other people think of you, then you're, I guess more internally, defining your identity.

It can be an enormous help for calling out the elephant in the room or saying something that other people might not say out loud.

It means that, because of this radical honesty, relationships are built on solid stuff. There's no dubious duplicity and hidden agendas.

It's much more that: what you see is what you get.

When they do hyperfocus, they are into a particularly interesting subject for them, they're extremely well informed. You may just have to say you know I've reached my capacity on that subject now, if they're going on a little bit.

I always give permission to my friends to do that.

And they're [neurodiverse people] extremely loyal. Keep confidences, and they're used to being a self-starter and getting things going because they don't necessarily rely on the energy of the group.

So, a whistle stop tour of social change, differences and format, take a look at some of the sensory differences.

[Yeah. So, whilst the slides change there is a great comment by the way that came through [on chat] we should be talking about "great minds think differently"].

Absolutely love that quote, I'm stealing it!

Thank you. So, on the sensory front, what I'm at pains to explain here is that, in terms of the mechanics, there is no difference. So, - the mechanics being the biology - so my ear, and the way that I hear is exactly the same as somebody else who is not sensory sensitive. It's how those auditory signals are interpreted in my brain, in my case amplified, that changes my experience of the world.



So, it's more neurological than physical [anatomical]. So, my touch and your touch, no different, but it's the way that your brain interprets those signals, which may vary.

And so we take in information from the world in a wide variety of senses. Some we are more familiar with, you know, taste, touch sight, hearing, smell, but some don't always come readily to mind when we think about our senses, such as our sense of balance.

And so, if you are more sensitive in balance, for example, you might get car sick really easily and things like that.

Body positioning might just come across as being a bit more clumsy. I describe it as 'not always knowing where your edges are'.

[If you could click that animation for me, Matt, thank you] and internal self-monitoring is about knowing whether you're hungry or thirsty, or tired or whatever it is not always getting those messages from your body quite so strongly.

And I'm sharing my map here, because again, it depends. You have to ask the person we're all unique individuals. And so my sensory map is a mixture, I'm oversensitive on some things, under sensitive on others, and pretty much equal on other parts of it.

And so, this impacts everything you do, with how you interact with the world.

And means that you're having a very different experience of the world. And this has an impact on wellbeing.

So if we look at some of the challenges and the advantages. If you're in an open plan office as many of us are, think about that constant environment induced stress.

So, noise, for example, to me, approximately, as best as I can tell is about 10 times the volume.

And so, the general background noise you know is turned up times 10. So it's a lot louder - it's a lot more distracting. And you can imagine when the fire alarm goes off how much that makes me jump.

Okay, so if I'm oversensitive or under sensitive to all the different senses will make a big difference. It's why you might see some people in the office, preferring to wear earplugs or ear defenders, or, you know, they're always wearing a baseball cap because of the overhead fluorescent lights for example, and doing what they can to adjust to the environment they're in.

Of course that comes with some social stigma if someone's sitting there with ear defenders on. And, you know, people think they're really anti-social or whatever.

Some people are unable to distinguish useful noise from background noise. So, if someone's having a conversation with you in the office, and other people are nearby having a conversation, being able to separate what words are coming from this individual from that individual from an auditory point of view might be tricky. Okay, so it's just thinking about the environments that we're acting in.

And, of course, some of those things can actually be really advantageous, depending on the context and the setting. So, one thing I was always appreciative of as a manager and leader is having really acute hearing. Because frequently people think they're out of ear shot, and you get to hear what's going on on the grapevine. Or if someone's talking under their breath, then you know what they're saying and so it can have enormous advantages as well.

If you're a chef and you've got really sensitive, you know, taste, that could be really helpful. Musicians great on sound nuances that's going to be helpful, but not being able to smell well and sewage work will also be very helpful.

So it very much depends on the context of whether these things are an advantage or disadvantage.

But they all take energy and mean that we're experiencing the world differently.

Now, with all of those differences, you know, how we think, the cognitive stuff, our social interactions, and how we take in information from the world by our senses. That is all pervasive through everything you do every day.

And so it has the ability then depending on people's levels of difference on how much effort that takes to get by in a world not made for you. And Matt is now going to look at some of the conversation around mental health and mental health conditions.

**Matthew:**

Yeah, so Angela has made some graphics for these next couple of slides, and I might lean on her if I struggle to explain them.

But yeah, generally speaking, when we think about mental health in relation to neurodiversity. Firstly, thinking about mental health distinct from neurodiversity and also recognizing that many people won't have a diagnosis of anything but do have either traits of neurodevelopmental conditions. You know we've got to recognize it's a lack of access to diagnostic assessment for a lot of people who identify as neurodiverse a lot of the adult population in this country will be missed in childhood. For example with much. There is much better early recognition and access to early Assessment but there's a huge amount of people that won't have any sort of diagnosis of anything.

And the same with regards to mental health.

A lot of people will experience mental health difficulties or challenges at times but won't necessarily have a formal diagnosis of anything.

And it's important to recognize that we all experience mental health, and it's our current physiological and emotional wellbeing on a range from mental wellness to mental ill health, and it varies and fluctuates massively depending on what's going on in life. And that could be on a day-to-day basis or it could be a cycle over a period of months you know. And at the moment you know I think this is particularly relevant to everybody.

It's likely that most people whether they've recognized it in themselves in the past will be experiencing some level of anxiety about the current state of the world, and potentially some, some difficulties with mood or low mood because of the prolonged lockdown experience.

So it's really important that we're talking about this and having open and frank conversations about it. And if we can't talk about mental health now I don't know when we can, you know.

We'll just give a few examples of particular mental health challenges that some people from the neurodiverse community might experience that are potentially different to others.

So, I'm just thinking about, again, how you're wired up. [Your hard wiring] As Angela has put on this slide, is as unchangeable as men, having babies.

And, the point here is that people might be wired up differently, but all ways of thinking and being are valid, viable, valuable.

And, when you think about how neurodiversity, neurotypicality and mental health interact with each other, and... trying to make the graphics work.

Angela do you just want to explain this because you made this fabulous thing.

**Angela**

Yeah sure, just that regardless of the intangibility or the unchangeability of whether you are neurodiverse or neurotypical in your hard wiring - both present, both camps if you like, can experience a range of mental health, and they [mental health and mental health conditions] are different and distinct things.

Okay. And the reason this is important is because a lot of people who don't understand neurodiversity so well lump everything together into one bucket - usually the 'too hard' bucket.

And in the context of wellbeing. It's really important to notice that they are different things. And that you can impact, in terms of strategies and wellbeing interventions, to improve someone's mental health.

Even though you can't adjust the underlying wiring.

So there's much that can be done in this space to support neurodiverse and neurotypical people, you might have to just go about it a bit differently.

Now that you understand some of the challenges that may not have been visible to you before.

### **Matthew**

Yeah, thanks Angela, and, and also we're really aware of the concept of diagnostic-overshadowing where often other people assume that someone with a neurodevelopmental condition, that everything that person experiences is related to that, when actually a lot of the time it's things like anxiety.

This is often having a significant impact on a person, and whereas the neurodevelopmental condition will be a constant core to a person whereas, mental health will absolutely fluctuate.

And that anxiety is absolutely treatable as we can develop strategies to manage these things.

And here's a basic sort of representation of the process of anxiety, it's called the time intensity model.

And, and this is just a quick explanation of this.

Lots of people find this is a super helpful way of understanding the process of anxiety. As you can see at the bottom, you've got your baseline and this is you on a good day.

And this is absolutely relevant to everybody right now. You're on a good day when you go to new places, when you try new things. You see that up curve coming up there.

That's where your strategies will work, that's when they work most effectively.

The closer you get to that peak. And when we say peak, that could be a crisis state, that could be a meltdown, it could be a panic attack whatever we choose to refer to it as, there are often multiple factors that lead to that crisis state. That's also where everybody else gets involved as well, if you ever do come into contact with a person who's in that heightened state of anxiety.

Often, that's when people will ask, what's the matter? What can I do to help? Or place a load of demands on a person and it's just recognizing that someone might not be able to take in information at that point, and will need some sort of recovery time, which could be 10 minutes for some situations, it might be two days for another person in another context. And so, so it'll be hugely variable, and if you don't have enough recovery time you kind of get this spiky never quite coming back down to baseline and I think a really important point here is that a lot of people from the neuro diverse community might have a higher baseline than other people because it's a neurotypical world, essentially, and the amount of processing that people have to do and the things that people

have to navigate in life might lead to somebody's baseline being somewhere halfway up that scale a lot of the time, and therefore way less time to get to sort of crisis state if you like.

So, this is all about viewing this holistically and thinking about reducing stress and worry and nervousness and anxiety in all aspects of life to hopefully keep people closer to baseline more of the time and then you've got more capacity to deal with stuff as it goes wrong, or comes along in life.

Now, just very briefly, I think it's absolutely worth recognizing that there are a lot of people who will have kind of multi layered stresses in life.

So, there might be social stresses around feeling different to other people, being treated differently and then being misunderstood with a confusing social world to navigate and potentially difficulties over the course of life with regards to kind of forming and maintaining relationships and fitting into the world. Then you've got employment stresses around whether to disclose your diagnosis or not to an employer at a recruitment phase or in the workplace and kind of fear of discrimination. "Is it safe to disclose my diagnosis? Will I be treated differently?"

As a result of that, then about career development and opportunities, "will I be held back if I disclose my diagnosis to my employer?" and also masking and camouflaging in the workplace.

And then you've got the current situation with Covid and lockdown, and all the challenges that that brings and health concerns.

So, the point is these are things that everybody experiences but it's likely that there are multiple layers of this for, for a lot of people and, and we can't talk in absolutes about any of this but I think it's just worth recognizing. And everybody's got that threshold of what they can cope with and I think also, a lot of people from the neuro diverse community are super, super resilient because they've had to be for their whole life. But we've all got a threshold with this.

And thinking about support. As you can see here I think it's worth trying to have an understanding of what is actually causing someone to experience anxiety or stress. Is it about their condition or is it about the current situation that they're in?

And generally speaking, just offering support to develop resilience habits and strategies to manage anxiety and stress, especially in the workplace - we you know as an employer you obviously can't be responsible for everybody's wellbeing and anxiety and stress outside of work - but in relation to the, to the workplace, and this can cause a huge amount of stress for people so it's about practical solutions and giving time and space and support for people to develop those things and again thinking about it holistically. A lot of people might be experiencing a huge amount of stress from outside of work and managers need to be thinking laterally and creatively about what might be the cause and obviously signposting people to local services if they are available.

It's super patchy across the country. In terms of what you get access to depending on where you live. So a little recky of local services wherever you are, is going to be beneficial and then signposting people.

And then obviously, we'll talk about returning to work in a minute but clear guidance around returning to work for people, and an individual approach if they've got specific concerns around this.

And so, given that we're pushed for time.

We should probably get onto other points and then we can open up for questions, and I hope this all made sense to people and flowed alright. We could rapid fire, a lot of stuff at you in a very short amount of time.

[Quick question and Matt and I appreciate your time. What was the graph called? Somebody was asking].

So, the process of anxiety graph. So we refer to that as the Time Intensity Model.

And it's something that we've kind of adapted a little bit that I used to use a long long time ago. I used to work in care services - in residential services for people on the autism spectrum who had significant complex needs. We used this chart to sort of map out patterns in behavior. If incidents occurred, we would do a lot of reflective work and try and spot patterns and then support people to develop strategies. So yeah it's referred to as the time intensity model.

## Angela

Fab so we've covered an awful lot of content in a very short amount of time. And I'm now glad that we did that because having seen the poll results we now understand that there's more work that still needs to be done in that awareness piece.

So that was a massive amount of information. Let's boil it down to a few practical strategies that we can have.

So if we first think about remote working, and whether or not you might want to make that more permanent for neurodiverse colleagues across the three elements that we've been discussing: sensory, cognitive, and social - particularly sensory. You can imagine now if you look at the open plan work environment if that's where you are or, you know, maybe you're manufacturing in a noisy environment.

So, just taking those things into consideration and being led by the individual about what would make it easier for them.

And maybe it's, you know, it doesn't cost anything. It's just that at least once a day they want to go and work in, you know, a small office on their own, just to take a break from all the overwhelm.

Or maybe it's absolutely fine, they've demonstrated they can do their job from home. And so either that's a full-time basis or part-time arrangement of working from home and coming into the office and that will enable them to keep lowering that baseline of the stress that they're putting on their body.

And people, you know, a lot of people are doing the dress down thing every day now.

But being forced to wear a suit might be more restrictive, and that might have a bigger impact on someone who's neurodiverse than not, for example.

Obviously, if you're working at home, it would vary depending on whether you are fortunate enough to have a separate room in which to work - maybe you've got a partner working in the same room, maybe you're homeschooling at the same time, and pets need attention, and so actually, it might be easier and better for you to go to the office. Okay, so everyone's situation will be different.

We're thinking about cognitive, you know what headspace do you need if you're hyper focusing, or you're not. Do you work on an interrupt mode well, or not? Collaborating, you know if you're dyslexic it's quite possible that you're doing a lot more written communication at the moment. And, you know, whether you've got access to assistive technology in the same way at home as you do at work.

[In your work environment] Whether there's sufficient energy and variety of stimulation - it's going to be different for everybody.

And another thing that's often misunderstood, is that the assumption is that people who are neurodiverse are more introverted. It isn't necessarily the case, they're just as likely to be introverted or extroverted.

It's just that their capacity for social interaction is probably less. And so they're a bit more choosy about when they expend that energy and who they consider to be high-value time spent for that energy.

So a number of things to consider. Again, be led by the individual, and have a conversation with them, even if they don't realize they are neurodiverse, which is coming up a lot in the chat, as for myself I was only diagnosed right at the end of 2019.

But I still have had really good coping strategies for a long time.

Because for my profession I need to be super self-aware, right, so that has been helpful to me personally.

And in terms of returning to the workplace.

Is it necessary? Is it safe?

Yes, everyone has health concerns. It may be that someone is particularly focused on it in an OCD type way.

And so, allaying those fears might take more time than for somebody else.

And we've talked about sensory, you know maybe that is if they're taking public transport to work, allowing them to shift their day, so that they're not in the thrust of the commuter traffic and the sensory overwhelm that that can be chalking up.

Ways of working: and being okay that there are periods of the day, maybe of each day, when they're just not contactable as if they were in a meeting, even though they're not in a meeting, they're just concentrating on something.

And if, you know, many people have been starved of interaction, especially if they live alone. Then, acknowledging that bonding and reconnection is going to take time.

And so, allowing people to kind of ease into the social element and reconnect with colleagues before getting back into the main meat of the work might be very useful.

And, you know, it's another change on top of a lot of change. and those coping strategies and mechanisms for interacting in neurotypical ways are now less front of mind.

So if they're showing up being a bit more neurodiverse, great! We pray that everyone can learn to accept that as perfectly acceptable.

Then it's just noticing that it might happen more often.

And we need to whistle through this now.

Your super quick version, quick version.

**Matthew**

I'll be boundaried, as ever.

So yeah, just some considerations around kind of social distancing, socializing and the long term impact of all of this on people, it can be helpful to think about this in terms of introvert or extrovert.

I've been apparently told by one of my psychologists in my team that I'm the classic definition of an extrovert and that has been incredibly noticeable throughout this lockdown period just not getting enough social contact and stimulation.

For people who are maybe more introverted we're acutely aware that a lot of people who might have, you know, had an alright experience in terms of lockdown, will have a huge amount of difficulty coming back out the other side, and the loss of lack of practice in terms of social interaction I think is going to be significant for a lot of people. And a lack of confidence and some increased social anxiety when coming back out into the world again, whatever that looks like when we come out the other side, and difficulty with the sensory environment.

Yeah, people are absolutely able to control their own environment or for a lot of people there are obviously multiple factors in terms of being able to control your own environment if you're working from home or remote working. It depends on whether you've got kids or pets that interject on your zoom meetings and stuff like that but generally speaking people will have much more control over their sensory environment.

And also, as Angela has mentioned, that the changes that are occurring now often with regards to the rules and the guidance they are rapidly changing and a lot of people would have struggled to make those adjustments or interpret, how other people adhere to things like social distancing and adhering to rules in public and stuff like that.

And so again, some people might find it overwhelming and need a gradual return to normality or social aspects of life, whereas other people are absolutely chomping at the bit to get back out there, and will be running around talking to everyone and hopefully hugging everyone as soon as humanly possible. So, we have to sit on the fence a little bit with some of these and we can't have a lot of the solutions for everybody because there are individual circumstances, outside of the kind of wider context of all of this.

So, ask people what they need, ask people if they have any specific concerns, and develop support networks in the workplace and in life in general.

We need to absolutely promote a culture of awareness, and we like the concept of an allyship as well.

You know, if you've got neurodiverse colleagues in the workplace. And it's great if organizations have support systems in place to have neurodiversity networks within organizations to encourage and allow time and space and resource for people to meet and share strategies and undertake awareness raising within the organization, but also to make sure that that's not a siloed thing as well, and that there are other people, both accessing that and engaging in that and working together collaboratively to drive things forward.

And a lot of people benefit from having contact with people who have had a similar experience to themselves and, and often have a lot of strategies individually in place, that would be really helpful to share with other people. You know, for example we run solution focused problem-solving groups with autistic adults in Bristol, and people present a problem that they're having and other people, all contribute and chip in and share strategies, really simple stuff but hugely, hugely valuable.

So yeah, it's just making sure that people are aware of the importance of this and that there is time and space and resources put aside to allow this to happen.

And then, yeah, just a bit on the long-term impact of coronavirus and lockdown.

Absolutely mental health issues have become more apparent for everybody.

And we must obviously take mental health seriously now more than ever.

And, you know, some of the things that we've touched on already in terms of increased opportunity to work remotely might absolutely suit some people and might be really, really difficult for other people.

We know that a lot of businesses and organizations are not intending to go back to a physical office space - you know taking the Twitter lead - and then either allowing everybody to work from home or just deciding that rent is too expensive and we don't actually need to do this anymore. So, it's going to be, you know, a huge amount of consideration for everybody and all organizations, but also recognizing that some people might be way more productive in their own environment.

So it's just having a flexible approach and an individual approach as much as possible trying to meet the needs of your organization but also make sure that people are supported properly and are able to work to their best.

Right, conscious of time.

[Somebody said personalization is key, get that right and that the rest falls into place. I think you know there's never been a greater need for individual approaches for everybody, than there is right now.]

**Angela**

Absolutely.

And so, I'm picking up on exactly that point, we need to co-create the win-win solutions. And these are also known as reasonable adjustments. OK, so the attitude and approach that you can take that can be extraordinarily beneficial, is to respect someone's self-management. They are an expert in themselves - they know what increases or decreases their energy. And allow them some control over the environment. It doesn't have to cost anything.

Cognitive. Back to the spiky profiles. Some things you're great, some things you're really not and you're actually never going to pick it up, it doesn't matter how much training you do, because your brain just doesn't work that way.

Then play to their strengths, okay. And not everything can be learned.

Matthew mentioned before about carving jobs up in different ways to, you know, I call it a bookend buddy. So the whole job that it needs to get done, gets done.

But you just might divide it up differently between two people to get the best out of both of them.

And what goes a very long way is presumed competence: different isn't deficient. So, you know. Don't treat me like an idiot and don't assume that I can't do something - ask me - it goes a long way.

And in terms of social, that sense of belonging, something we all need as human beings is to feel like we're part of something.

And the things that apply to everyone - praise, encourage and appreciate, but recognize how far that goes when you're mostly living in a world where everyone tells you you're doing it wrong.

So a bit of appreciation goes a really long way, social support and being accepted for who you are. We're all a little bit quirky somehow, some of us are just a lot more obvious about it.

So, final points then it's all around [1] making it safe to talk about neurodiversity, and mental health, and making it possible for people to reveal. There will be a lot of people, statistically we know there will be people in the workplace, who either don't know [they are neurodiverse] themselves and therefore, going on awareness training may bring something up for them that they want to investigate, and making it possible to explore that will be of use.

[2] Knowing which of your colleagues, either self-identify have been diagnosed as neurodiverse, again, you won't necessarily know that if you haven't done step one. [3] Know how, you know, Matt and I run a series of different workshops on different slices of really practical applications where we



don't go 100 miles an hour like this to raise awareness for the whole organization. You know, for those that are managing people who are neurodiverse, people who are neurodiverse managing others or are being managed. You know, and the teams of people who include neurodiverse and just get everyone to much better understand what's going on.

Personalization, personalization, personalization, as was contributed many times in the chat.

Absolutely.

If we lead with empathy, clarity, honest communication and understanding.

That is the best place to start, and the solutions will emerge.

And don't wait.

start now.

And think of what your next steps might be.

So if we can run our final poll James.

### **Matthew**

We are so conscious that this was a webinar, rather than interactive learning, which is our usual preferred approach. We had designs around breakout rooms and chat and people talking amongst each other and then something like six hundred people registered and we felt we better have a rethink.

So as a result of this workshop what action will you take next?

And then we'll move into the q & a Matt, while we're waiting for the poll results.

[So many questions coming through and if it's, you know, it's not possible to answer all of them every so engage lots of really positive feedback as well coming through.

What I would say is that, don't worry everybody if yours hasn't been answered. Afterwards, the speakers will jot down the answers and I'll share that with all the attendees. So there are some quite specific questions and things asking for follow up information so it's probably better if we deal with those later.

One question that came through for either Matthew or Angela is, if an employee has not been diagnosed as neurodiverse, but they seem to be sort of experiencing challenges related to lack of engagement and so forth. How do you approach that? How do you know if that's due to a neurodiverse condition or not?]

### **Matthew**

Yeah, that's a really good question, and it's difficult and it's something that we get asked about a lot. My interpretation of that is if you suspect someone to be neurodiverse, but they don't have a diagnosis and you don't know how to broach the subject with them? Is what I'm kind of taking from that question and it's something that we get asked a lot and, and it's a really difficult thing to think about.

If you do approach it with a person doing that incredibly sensitively, and, and never about, "I think you might be...", or "I think you might have...", because that is super intimidating and, you know, and could easily cause a huge amount of offence. We've got to recognize that lots of people, because of the way that this has been referred to for years and years and years might have a negative impression or think this has negative connotations for themselves, so if you suggest this to a person that could be really challenging. We always suggest, if, if you are going to broach this with a

person to maybe present them with some information and ask them if they feel that they relate to it in some way, rather than making it about “I think” because, again, that can be hugely detrimental to relationships.

Angela Do you have anything you would say about that?

### **Angela**

Absolutely. I mean, you just think about it in these terms you wouldn't go up to someone necessarily and say do you think you might be gay? You know, that's their world - that's their business.

And, yeah, we cannot, you know, do a quick awareness session and presume to be competent to diagnose mental health conditions.

And so, I'd be inclined just to steer away from it, personally. And ask them, get in the habit of asking really nice clean questions, which is something as a coach that you know you can do as second nature, so you're not leading them.

But, you know, there might be anecdotes that you choose to share more generally, that points towards resources that might be useful for the team to understand, without necessarily zoning in on individuals or stigmatizing by talking about them rather than to them.

### **Matthew**

Make it about strengths and sometimes it can be helpful to talk about characteristics or - since I was gonna say this in relation to mental health earlier - you know if somebody's low in mood or seems depressed, you could suggest you ask somebody if they're depressed, but that might be really challenging for them. Whereas, if you talk about symptoms of stuff, you know, “are you over sleeping or under sleeping?” talking about some characteristics can be a much more sort of gentle way of introducing a conversation about something. Or just asking people what their experiences of certain situations, whether they be social, or work related things.

[But be careful about the language that we're using. Some of this actually links into what Caroline's going to be talking about later in it's kind of it's about making sure that you are providing an environment that's inclusive for everybody.

So I've just got time for one very last quick question. And here's one for Angela: the number of resources feels overwhelming where do you start with increasing awareness about neurodiversity?]

### **Angela**

Great question. There is absolutely a huge volume of information that's out there.

So, I would say, know which one you're dealing with whether it's mental health [changeable] or a mental health condition [hard-wired] as Matt described earlier. So I'm going to say [for mental health] resilience habits right, but resilience habits absolutely can be learned and can be valuable for everyone. And that may just be enough to help your neurodiverse colleagues to manage their own [stress] baseline and use their own coping strategies.

If you're going for neurodiverse information specifically that you want to find out about.

And I'd really say my first choice would be getting in dialogue about it with people who really know the subjects, and include in that some of your colleagues who themselves are neurodiverse, so that you can get into some of that more specific tailoring of - what does it mean for us here? Now, what are the practical solutions that solve that?

And using experts can absolutely shortcut the vast amount of knowledge that's out there and point you to the resources that are going to be most useful to you.

I can see in the chat lots of people who recommended books to each other that particularly resonated for them.

And also be led by your people who are neurodiverse around what they find useful in terms of sharing, or not sharing.

You know, for example, I showed my sensory map, and they don't necessarily know that tool or won't have access to it, but it's using frameworks like that. To give you a model which is not me and not you, it's this, and I can therefore explain myself.

In this way, and then we can talk about this [map], and it's just less personal almost than talking about "what did you experience" because you're saying here's my map and let's talk about my map.

Some of those techniques, and of course the employer guides from DMA.

[Absolutely, we will be providing links to those in the follow up notes, I can see we're going to be doing lots of follow up here.

Thank you so much, so much positive feedback, and the poll showed that lots of people are going to be applying lots of the points that you've raised.

And, you know, we will try and address all of your points if we possibly can in the follow up notes and provide some additional links and information and so forth.

Fantastic Matthew and Angela you're going to stay with us, aren't you, and come back towards the end, for a bit of a wrap up].

**Matthew:**

Yeah, absolutely. And just want to say thank you to everyone.

We hope that this has felt like time well spent. And, and we've done justice to the subject in a, in a short amount of time. Me and Angela are more than happy to have ongoing conversations about all of this, and will be sticking around for the rest of the session, but don't go away, everybody. We've got more coming up.

**Claire**

So now we've got Stewart Blair from texthelp joining us, and he's going to be talking about the use of technology to support neurodiversity.

Network Rail, who are actually one of texthelp's clients – Caroline will be giving really great insight into how this works in action, not just the technology but how they actually support the well being of neuro diverse colleagues within an inclusivity strategy and within their wellbeing strategy.

So with No further ado, over to Stuart. If you'd like to just briefly introduce yourself that'd be fantastic.

**Stuart**

No problem. Thank you very much Claire. Can I just confirm you can see my screen and hear me okay?

Yeah, that's fine. Perfect, perfect. Well, I'm, I'm Stuart Blair, and I'm a workplace Product Manager, at Texthelp. So my role within texthelp is to ensure that our assistive technology products are continuing to develop and continuing to help the people that they're created for. People with neuro

diverse conditions and people with accessibility issues. And can I just begin by thanking Matthew and Angela I thought that session was terrific and I know you're quite tight on time and you could have explained so much more.

I think at the first poll I clicked somewhere in the middle. I'd say I have a reasonable understanding of neurodiversity, but it's only when you go through a session like that you realize just how much you have to learn.

And you can always be educated on the subject. I'd also like to thank our participants. I've been following the chat and it's great to see a real community feeling there and see you guys offering up your own opinions, your own circumstances but also recommending suggestions for others. I think that's really terrific and something that could only be born out of these types of sessions.

For my brief session I'm going to try and do a whistle stop tour, as like everybody I'm very keen to hear from Caroline. I want to talk about how technology can help to support those with neuro diverse conditions and your diverse colleagues.

To begin to do that, I want to first look at very briefly, some of the impact of the coronavirus, and some of the impact that we've all seen through working from home, and the effects that this can have on things like our mental health, particularly given the coronavirus.

And as the guys touched on, I'm sure we all feel different things happening to us in terms of where we are. Some people might feel overwhelmed. Some people might feel this prolonged working from home as a real struggle, and there is constant change between going into lockdowns and coming out of lockdowns and other real disruption to routine, particularly for those who might have any form of other things going on.

I know the team earlier mentioned people with pets. I have a husky who's currently crying outside my door because she's not allowed into the room when I'm on calls, but imagine if someone's having to homeschool and really prioritize their day. They're finding that a day is going to fill up very quickly with homeschooling and then still trying to put in the hours into the workplace.

I want to touch very briefly on the point that many of us are feeling we're not able to say no in this environment. I feel like there's almost a guilt in terms of working from home at the moment.

And I certainly find from a personal point of view that when I'm working from home, I'm working longer hours than I've ever worked. The nine to five doesn't really exist anymore.

You're working past five o'clock now for the simple fact that when your computer's in the other room, you can meet tighter deadlines, you can push the limits a little more.

And I do think as a community and as a working community we really are risking burnout.

To look at some of what the stats say - and it follows on from what Angela and Matthew said earlier on - there were 602,000 cases of work related stress or anxiety between 2018 and 2019 in Great Britain, and in 2018 and 2019 depression or anxiety were responsible for 44% of all cases of work related ill health and 54% of all working days lost due to ill health issues.

And that really just goes to identify how large of an issue this is, and it's an issue that doesn't really get spoken about. It's great to see now in modern times such a spotlight being shown on mental health and neurodiversity, but that wasn't the case, even as short as four or five years ago. One out of five people take a day off due to stress yet 90% of these people say that a different reason for their absence.

And that's all around that stigma around mental health as Angela was talking about earlier on.

What the stats say is that presenteeism accounts for two times more losses than absenteeism and presenteeism at the moment, particularly in this working from home environment is very hard to identify, because you're not in that social situation within the office when you have direct interaction with your colleagues. Every year presenteeism costs businesses around 1300 pounds per employee if mental health needs are unsupported.

So organizations really need to be doing more to look at mental health and neuro diversity. Mental ill health is responsible for 72 million working days lost and costs just under 35 billion each year.

So, that gives you the real scale of the problem.

9 out of 10 people with mental health problems say that stigma and discrimination have negative effects on their lives.

So this is all about trying to make that message - make people more aware. Towards the end of last year became a mental health first aider for texthelp.

It's actually not about being responsive, it's about your organization being outspoken. It's about organizations letting people know what support is available to them who they can speak to. Really showing that they care about their employees, as opposed to waiting until something happens,

Imagine the impact on people with neurological or neuro diverse conditions who may be struggling and as Angela said it's not a one size fits all, we're not saying that everybody who has a neurological condition will be struggling with this.

I've had to learn about seven different ways of using online platforms such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams, GoToMeeting, GoToWebinar and every single one works differently. It's such a struggle that when you're doing a meeting like let's try to remember which button to click and if it's in this platform or a different one, and even for somebody like me who considers themselves relatively tech savvy it can still be very challenging. So for somebody who's maybe not digitally literate, it could be a real struggle.

One in 10 has a neurological condition.

And many hide their condition so this is all around that stigma.

I've worked with a lot of large public sector and private sector organizations and these are some of the quotes that we've heard from people who need assistive technology or are scared to go through assistive technology assessments.

Around fearing being find out they don't want to risk losing their job, particularly in an environment now, where we are seeing companies go out of business unfortunately we are seeing redundancies we're seeing a lot of furlough, and nobody wants to really stand out in a crowd, and they don't want their colleagues to judge or exclude them, they don't want to be excluded from promotional opportunities. And again, that's very much what the people picked up on or what Angela and Matthew picked up earlier but being the right person for the job, not just a one size fits all approach, and they don't feel good enough or smart enough.

So what can we do to help, and this is when it starts to look at the importance of diversity and inclusion within your organization. I know Caroline is going to touch on this a lot more from her view and from what Network Rail have done but it's about getting buy in from the top.

So making sure that it is a top down approach, making sure you have buy in from senior members of staff. It's about training staff as mental health first aiders like I mentioned, I was lucky enough to be one of those for text help, and it really opened my eyes to my colleagues and understanding my

colleagues a lot more. looking out for some of the signs. And as I mentioned earlier on making sure I approach these colleagues in the right way.

Training managers, make sure everybody in your organization has an awareness of neuro diversity and awareness of mental health. Not everyone needs to be qualified but everyone needs to be able to spot the signs, particularly with managers who, at the moment, and in a working from home environment are probably the direct contact for many employees.

Listen, talk with your employees, it seems so simple to say, but actually the number of your organization's you aren't getting this right at the moment is incredible.

One of my favorite lines when you work in technology is that technology doesn't solve every problem.

And we want to balance being human, with technology that enables us. So, the right tools can improve our mental health, enable us to concentrate the focus on purpose, and ensure productivity, but it's ensuring that first it is the correct tools,

it's not one size fits all and throw every piece of technology at someone and expect it to work.

When our leaders have the right tools they can engage, empower and support staff. And again that's coming down from a buy in from the top.

And when staff feel empowered and focused, they can innovate, they can be inclusive and they can be inspired. It was a great comment I think that was referenced earlier on by Claire in the chat and I agree - all the great minds think differently.

One of the comments I've always liked to use through working with text help is that we need to start thinking differently about different thinking, and we need to start being more inclusive and seeing the real benefits and positive things that people who do think differently can bring to teams.

What do we want from our technology?

So as a person working from home, what do I want my technology to be able to do for me? I want it to be easy to find and easy to use, I need it to be intuitive.

I don't want to have to go through 18 hours worth of training to simply use it.

I want it to work with the tech and devices that I already use so it needs to integrate seamlessly.

It absolutely has to be accessible and accessibility should be at the heart of what every assistive technology company puts it in the marketplace.

It absolutely has to be able to be tailored to suit my individual needs. Because, people who might happen to have dyslexia will have different requirements for their individual dyslexia. And there has to be clear benefits for everybody.

What do we want our tech to do for us?

So we want our tech to make it easy for us to understand and create documents.

We want our tech to be simple fit into the screen that we work with, but we want it to make our spelling better, we want to deliver grammar better, we want it to give us more confidence when sending that email to your boss or creating that report that we've had to create, and we want it to be built with a dyslexic brain. So most of your Google Docs software most of your Microsoft Office software will do a lot of spell checking and will do a lot of grammar checking, but what it won't pick up on is those finer points and those finer details like a word spelled correctly but in the wrong place. Someone with dyslexia, for example, might have spelled that word perfectly and it might

make perfect sense to them. But actually, it's the wrong word at the wrong time in the wrong place but because it's spelled correctly, that won't be picked up on.

I do it all the time 'there, they're and their' or 'where, were and we're' all that type of thing. we want to make sure we're punctuated correctly and we want to make sure that we get more confidence from the responses we get our documents, particularly when there is a lot of communication going back and forth digitally, and it's not so much as just sitting in a meeting anymore.

We want our information to be accessible in a format that suits us best I know that there's a gif on the screen here and you won't be able to hear sound but the feature that is demonstrating is text to speech.

The team talked a lot earlier about different types of processing. And if somebody is an auditory processor, or somebody has severe dyslexia you're looking at an email like that with black text on a white background.

And for somebody like that, who's neuro diverse, that could be jumbled up that could be fuzzy.

They may be an auditory learner and this might actually save them a tremendous amount of time by simply going to the start of that email hitting play, having that email read aloud to them in a natural sounding voice.

We work with a lot of companies throughout the UK and there's a particular fire service that we worked with, and when we went in with assistive technology we tried to do some analysis and the benefits that they had.

And there was a firefighter who explained that for him and his version of dyslexia.

It would take him about three minutes more to process an email this length, then it would his colleague, and he gets 30 emails roughly a day.

So that's 90 minutes of his day, spent processing emails that the person next to him doesn't have to do. You work that out over a week and a full working day of his week, simply spent trying to process an email that his colleagues didn't need to do.

Whereas now with assistive technology, he can hit play at the start of those emails, he can tailor the speed of the voice exactly. He can process audio much much quicker someone like myself who's not neuro diverse and essentially we see that impact on the working week, which was incredible.

Next feature we have the screen masking. Screen masking very simple somebody who's visually impaired might suffer from Meares Irlen syndrome, black text white background might be very difficult for them to read, but they might have been given a diagnosis of an RGB code on a particular color that makes it easier for them to read and assistive technology gives you the ability to put a screen mask and tailor that color to the exact color that would benefit you.

Finally, then for the gifs we have our research features so again productivity for all research features give you the ability to highlight within a document, collect those highlights, organize your thoughts and make it stand out and collect in a way that suits you best. As you can see on the screen.

Most assistive technologies, the one Texthelp offers a product called Read & Write and conscious of time I won't talk too much about it but if you'd like to ask me any questions we can follow up after the session. It's accessible for all so it's one subscription one sign in, any device you want it to be able to be tailored for anybody within your organization.

And I will finish very briefly with texthelps mission and texthelps vision. So we want to unlock everyone's full potential through technology, and we see a world where difference, disability and language are no longer a barrier for anybody.

And that was a whistle stop finish. I hope that's okay Claire, I'm going to hang up for the q&a as well. So please do ask me a question as Claire mentioned if we can't get to the q and a I'm more than happy to follow up after the session.

**Claire**

Fantastic. Thanks, thanks so much. I've got one very quick question for you now actually - does the software that you have assist organizations on their disability confident journey?

**Stuart**

Absolutely. So we're very close to the disability confident organization. And, and the software we offer can look at your D&I policies that can help you with your recruitment policies can really hone in on helping you through that journey.

**Claire**

Fantastic which actually is the perfect segue into Caroline's input.

**Caroline**

Yes, I'm just afraid to share my screen.

And you can let me know if you see it.

**Claire**

[Yeah, a few people are having trouble seeing slides I'm not having any trouble so it's hard for me to relate to, but if you are having trouble, try logging out closing everything down and coming back in with just zoom open].

Over to you, Caroline.

**Caroline**

Hi there.

I can't seem to get rid of the, the toolbar at the top for them so I apologize for that I hope it's not too distracting.

So my name is Caroline. I work for Network Rail.

My role is called an access and inclusion manager and sits within the diversity inclusion team at Network Rail.

So, this presentation, it's about 12 slides. It really just scratches the surface. It's just a demonstration of how we've sort of gone about this at Network Rail.

And following on from Stuart's presentation, we actually have all of the text help tools and available, and on an open license that network to all employees, so they can download stuff without sort of the stigma of having to get permission or having a cost associated with it, and we find that that's really quite useful.

And it just gives open access to anybody that needs it.



And then just following up from Matthews point about those Autism at Work programs. We don't actually have an Autism at Work program at Network Rail.

And I do feel personally there are some issues with schemes like that because they tend to exclude people. So, you know, when you're focusing on a diagnosis or, you know, that people must meet certain requirements for an approved place..

Then, lots of people are excluded. and, and it can also bring some extra stigma, what does it was people that are brought in through that program. And what are their promotion opportunities? Does it mean that they are always known as the person that came in through that program? So, you know I see that they're useful in some settings, but I don't think that they are the entire answer, and that's why I'm going through this case study with you now.

So our network is just below inclusion so for anybody with any type of condition rather than focusing on conditions, it's focusing on the, the barriers are the experience that the employee has so straight back to the social model of disability which is my favorite subject. And I'll go through the slides now.

So you might not know who Network Rail are. We own and operate and develop Britain's railway infrastructure so that's basically the stations, the track, the overhead line stuff and the signals, all that kind of stuff.

And, we also manage 20 of the UK's largest stations, all the other stations are managed by the different train operating companies.

So our purpose is to get people where they need to be, and to support our country's economic prosperity. By running a safe, reliable and efficient network - we are serving customers and communities.

So that's just a very, very quick background about what Network Rail does.

We've actually got 44,000 employees, and a variety of roles based all over the UK, and about half of our employees at the moment are working remotely from home.

And when you look at the statistics that are neurodiverse, and I think, Stuart mentioned one in 10 people have neurodiverse conditions, actually Business Disability Forum and have stats to show that the likelihood of this in society's being about one in seven people. So statistically that's about six and a half thousand employees. So I guess that just shows you - I think there's a misconception out there that we're talking about small numbers of people and that it's less important.

Because of that, it's one in seven of all of us in, you know, in any organization

Network Rail has a diversity and inclusion strategy, it's called Everyone Matters - and we've published a five year plan. Inclusion and disability matters is one of the areas within strategy, which looks at being an inclusive employer for disabled people, all different conditions and, and also an inclusive service provider to disabled and older passengers, in our stations and using our network.

That is a whistle stop tour, so it might seem a bit sketchy jumping from one subject to another. I wanted to talk about a Rail Wellbeing Live, and you might think when you are listening to me talking - well, we're not talking about neurodiversity specifically.

But it's about recognizing that not everyone who is neurodiverse has a diagnosis or sees it and themselves. And so our approach is to talk about mental health and well being, to everyone and make sure that it's inclusive of all of the different conditions too.

So one of the things that we did this year was we did our first Rail Wellbeing Live event. and it was about working together as an industry, so Network Rail is part of a wider rail industry.

And, we had a whole, day long session, based on well being. Having those discussions - we had some celebrity doctors, we had Ruby Wax. It was a whole day of different types of content delivered by experienced, and those reflect experience speakers leaders to speak about openly their own experiences, and their own mental health challenges through this time, and just really opening up the conversation for everybody that works in rail that this is so important to us all right now.

And there's a link to drop in the chat later. And you can see, and about how that went. Actually, 13,000 people had joined the Wednesday session so it was really quite impactful in the industry and allowed those conversations to happen actually. Because at work you say "Did you join the Rail Wellbeing session, or are you joining next week?", and sort of freed up the opportunity to have conversations. And then, you know, you don't as an organization or an employer, you don't have to do it yourself you can collaborate with other similar industries to set things up. So, you know, it doesn't cost as much but also, you're reaching more people which is really quite critical.

The rail industry's first mental wellbeing survey, and it was conducted by Railway Safety Standards Board and in partnership with the University of Surrey. And really the purpose of that was to try and get some key data on what are people experiencing.

And what can we do to make things better, and what you know, what support, what resources. What things do we need to change as an industry?

And I think that's quite critical to not just think about the anecdotal evidence that you have about well being and your organization but also having some of the data to back that up and help you really prioritize the work that you need to do.

One of the things that we did during Covid 19 we set up a welfare and wellbeing taskforce element to our diversity and inclusion strategy. So it was very on the spot, reactive, and to Covid 19. And basically, we set up the resource hub for the subjects of managing your mental well being, managing your physical well being, managing your workspace and webinars and online resources.

And this allows managers to not feel that they didn't know the answer. So there was a one stop shop place for them to go, but it also had updates on policy changes that we need, that network, to tell people to work more flexibly and release or thrive and work, you know, whilst coronavirus is having an impact.

So, talk about the the webinars, so and we supported our colleagues at through some will be in webinars which are still ongoing.

And some were aimed at managers to provide advice and support, and others were open to our colleagues and it was, you know, really general subjects like mindfulness, managing energy levels, building and maintaining resilience, staying productive and setting boundaries, stretch and flex. And actually, all of these subjects, when we heard earlier from from Martin Angela, and, you know, the, the stress levels of anxiety that neurodiverse people might be experiencing a higher level.

And these are the types of conversations that we want to have. So we, we didn't do them as amateurs. We got experts and from each of these areas to speak on subjects.

And that really helped start those conversations as well.

So Network Rail does have a mental health and well being strategy and it's delivered by occupational health and well being team. So it sits slightly separately from the diversity inclusion team of course they're really entangled with each other.

So, we do have a mental health wellbeing hub which has all of the resources and guidance that we have around mental well being. And I just want to touch on two of those things here at a very high level.

So the resources to, like I said 44,000 employees across thousands of sites in the UK. So, having the resources that managers and teams can offer and share in the area.

So really easy access to those but making sure that at the right content and, you know, as a business we were really assured to see that it was useful content rather than just pointing people to different open sources of information, and to letting it to have people in their experience. And then the well being discussion tool, it's fantastic.

It's a structured way to have that conversation. So there's a couple of questions in the chat about how do you even start a conversation?. What, you know, what do you need to consider?. And this gets a structure, and to think about what you need to talk about as an employee or as a manager together, and it helps set the expectations for the discussion. And, and it's really been quite impactful for people who do and don't have diagnosed conditions, because if you're worried about the conversation with your line manager, if you know that - these are the things that are going to be talked about, you can prepare yourself beforehand and you can see, well that's something I'm not really comfortable about so I can tell them about that, that I'm not comfortable answering this question. And it just gives everybody a really clear expectation of, you know, the things that Network Rail an employer can do to support you.

And it talks about reasonable judgments, which is really quite key.

We also had an 'ask twice' video and discussion Park, I'm not going to go into details on that, But basically, this was for the teams, and for those on our network who maybe aren't using laptops or computers a lot.

And they're not interacting with Yammer or other communication channels, and they seem we because there may be an on track worker or they're working on sectionals.

And so this was a video that teams could watch and go through together as small teams and have those conversations, and they would get the, the resources, sort of presented to them and to really just sort of enable those conversations. I keep saying conversations...

It really is quite key that communication expectation begins and conversations that I have this week to get it, get it right.

And there were some comments in the chat about access to work. And I'm not going into detail on the Access to Work scheme in depth but there is the mental health support service.

And it's a publicly funded service that any employee, and in any organization in the UK can use.

It's fantastic because it's separate from the employer. So we do have Employee Assistance Program, but some employees can feel reticent, to say no to that because they feel it's connected with the workplace or that something they'll get back to their manager. And actually this is a really an independent service that people can access without anyone knowing and get that vocational and strategy of coaching at three and nine months, support plan, and it's absolutely brilliant.

I use the service myself and it's not counseling, it's not somebody to try to fix you and your condition to make you better. What they do is they, they offer strategy advice about how you can structure your day or approach a difficult conversation that you're worried about.

And it really is really really great so please do consider telling your employees about that service be widely promoted.

Somebody is saying 'is that able futures?'. Is that the same as able futures? This service is run by the Department for Work and Pensions and it's called Access to Work mental health support service.

And it's run by two different organizations, so they contract out to do that two different organizations, the one that Network Rail interacts with the most is called Remploy and, but it's the same service no matter which company, you end up getting it from,

It's completely free, and the employer does not have any cost. And it's all managed by the organization that's delivering it for the Department for Work and Pensions, great, fantastic.

How are we doing with slides, by the way, because I'm just a little time check here.

I've got two more, and it will actually be done in a minute and then the right insights and a renewed focus on the importance of reason by judgment.

So, last year we really did find that in some of our managers and leaders in our business, were reacting quickly to coronavirus. And to be perfectly honest, reasonable adjustments, get put to the bottom of the pile, so they think, well, this is an emergency, we must get this done.

And let's not think about reasonable adjustments because that's hard. And so we really had a renewed focus on the importance of them.

I think there are people who perhaps the way that we're working before coronavirus did not need adjustments, but then found that they're working from home or with different technology or whatever, that they needed extra support so we had a real focus on that. And it was delivered by Business Disability Forum who support organizations. So what was the experience delivering their knowledge to us.

On my last slide, reasonable adjustments specific documents, and we have reasonable adjustments guidance and toolkit and passport here which has all the information about adjustments.

It's got a focus on not needing diagnosis, and it's got a focus on not needing to talk about your health, or your condition, it's a focus on what barriers they experience.

And what do you need from as an employer to, to make things better.

And then the final thing is about a discussion passport. So, again, a structured discussion and say it. That helps the employee and line manager discussion records and a passport, that means that they can take that to another role or manager, and they don't have to have a fear around having that discussion again. That's me. That's my final slide.

Fantastic, thank you so much Caroline actually picking up the kind of reasonable adjustment point there's a question from way way right at the beginning but some somebody raised it and I think you've liked that you'd be happy to answer it.

What what comes How should companies are just interviewing style, based on disclosure of neuro diversity or across the board as many are without diagnosis, what you must do is offer reasonable adjustments to anybody that needs some saw the Quality Act,

2010 the law.

And you, it says that you don't need proof of diagnosis to put adjustments in place. So, what I would saw is that if somebody says that they need an adjustment for an interview.

And they tell you the barrier, and they may tell you that the adjustment suggestion or they or they may not depending on what the new about the process.

Make a decision on, is it reasonable to make the change and make the change. It's not about whether somebody is diagnosed with the condition or not. So there are lots of adjustments to recruitment processes that can be made quite easily.

And, and they don't need an occupational health referral or, you know, proof of diagnosis to do it. So a simple example would be somebody who has dyslexia and or ADHD. And as going through the interview and the end of us a competency based interview, and you normally present the questions to the candidate in the interview, they could ask for an adjustment to see the interview questions beforehand.

And then you could say, on what a reasonable team skill for that could be so you can see. Will you know will give you the end of your questions half an hour before it gives you time to read and digest them so that when you come in and then a few, you're already in a good place away stressed, to answer the question, and with the knowledge that you have so that's a really easy example.

Fantastic. Thank you so much. My family just coming and going a little bit at the moment so just another question, and you've touched on this a bit in your presentation.

How can communication specialist better support neuro neuro diverse colleagues. Thank you. We've talked about communication and conversations been really key and Assyria networks do we use business disparity for them there.

And we are a member of the organization, which means that we have access to all of the support and resources. So they've got a fantastic tool kit on communications for all disabled people actually about being really inclusive.

So I would point people towards that.

But they also have a new diversity tool kit which has a separate information very specific to, and how to communicate around Udacity and what works for some people, and what doesn't work so it's about having a variety of communication methods and not

making assumptions about what people need, it's just about giving variety and allowing people to choose how they're going to interact with that communication makes each channel, you know, having things in different ways.

And another question here in a traditional male dominated organization I know this is something that actually a lot of people grapple with with that particular challenges in influencing managers of the importance of supporting employees who have different challenges when it comes to mental health support and conditions and how this progress being measured.

Good question. So, you're right, and only 18% of our employees are female.

And I, personally, I don't think that there's a big difference between males and females and being able to appreciate what you don't want the different needs of people, but what I do think is that.

Yeah, I think when you show managers that might not be willing to talk about things like disability or noodles voc or mental health, the benefits that will bring to them as a manager or a leader.

So, if you tell them that if you do these things you will have a more productive workforce, which means that you'll have less time off, you will save money.

And then those are the types of things that can hit home. But I think, you know, we could have a whole hour long session on that. Yeah, absolutely.

Stuart lots of people asking how they could get a demo with best thing to do is just should we share your contact details you have to do that yeah absolutely share my contact details, or if they want to go on to the tax help website.

There'll be information there how they can set up demos, but if you just want to share my information that's fine.

Fantastic. Thank you so much, and well I think we've got so many questions I've only just scratched the surface there, but I know that Matthew and Angela wanted to do a wrap up for us so I'm gonna say thank you so much Caroline thank you so much to Angela and Matthew.

**Matthew**

Yeah, we just wanted to say again thank you ever so much for attending. We hope that, again, it's been a useful workshop for everybody that was great that everybody stayed engaged throughout, and we know that everybody's on a different part of the journey with regards to understanding and supporting neurodiversity in the workplace. So we hope that this is a continuation of already some excellent work for some of you, and the start of a conversation for everybody else, and I'm sure we'll be able to follow up to the event and, and please do keep in touch with us, because we really want to work with motivated, employers who are prepared to continue this conversation but also to to introduce more, as we discussed throughout, inclusive working practices. And I don't know if Angela wants to add anything to that, but I just want to say a massive thank you to everybody and all of the other people involved in this.

Stuart and Caroline, your talks were fantastic as well and I'm sure everybody got a huge amount from that. So yeah, thank you from us and we'll think about a follow up webinar.