

# How to create a workspace that celebrates and supports neurodiverse teams: Webinar transcript

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## SPEAKERS

Suzy Bashford, Jill Norris, Prof. Amanda Kirby, Rebecca Smyth

### **Suzy Bashford 00:00**

Hello, if you're just joining us, you're joining Make a Difference's webinar on neurodiverse teams. We've got a brilliant panel today, really excited. It's kindly sponsored by Texthelp, we've got Rebecca Smyth here from Texthelp, she's gonna be sharing her expertise.

### **Suzy Bashford 00:02**

So actually today Texthelp are going to be giving out 10 copies of Professor Amanda Kirby, who's with us, Texthelp is going to be giving out 10 copies to the first few people that register today on this session, and they will contact you after today's session, find out your details and send you a copy. So that's very exciting.

### **Suzy Bashford 00:26**

Professor Amanda Kirby is obviously one of the biggest names in neurodiversity. And I've seen her described on LinkedIn as a total legend, which she said before the call not to describe her as, so we'll just get going we'll let a few more people join actually as we're just waiting for people to join.

Laura, please, can you put up the poll questions? We've got two quick poll questions to do. So there we go. If you were asked to explain what neurodiversity is, would you be able to? Yes, somewhat, or No. And second question, how well do you feel your workplace supports neurodiverse teams and talent? Well, satisfactorily, poorly? So yeah, if you could have a quick think about that be really useful for us to gauge where you are on this issue, because we really pride ourselves on making a difference and doing really interactive sessions. So we want to hear from you audiences. If you have any questions, put them in the chat. We will try and scan them as we go along and ask them, put them to audiences, put them to our panellists.

So we've got somebody saying hi, from a very snowy Birmingham here, it's very snowy in the Cairngorms where I am as well. So a couple of housekeeping tips. While you're doing that, as well, today's webinar is being recorded, we will send you an a follow up email link, and it will have access to the recording but also really useful links from our speakers. And you'll get an accessible PDF as well. As I've said, it's really interactive. So please do share your thoughts and your experiences as you go

along. Oh, and also, I've just had a quick message from Claire in the comments, which for some reason I can't see very easily on my computer. But I'm Suzy Bashford, I'm features editor of make a difference media, which I should have said earlier.

**Suzy Bashford 02:45**

And also solution providers, we're really happy to have you here if you've joined the webinar. Please, please remember, don't be tempted to use the chat as an opportunity to pitch because that's not what it's for, but do get involved in the discussion.

**Suzy Bashford 03:03**

And then, of course, we've got our brilliant panel. I've mentioned Professor Amanda Kirby already author of neurodiversity at work and neuro diversity in education, as well as the great many other books and research papers we've got on make a difference media at the moment, a profile of her which is truly a fascinating background, and really does. We're so lucky to have her here today, as we are so lucky also to have Jill Norris from NHS, obviously, hugely busy job she does. And she's going to tell us about implementing all these ideas actually on the ground. And Smyth, who's inclusive Technology Specialist at our sponsor, Texthelp.

**Suzy Bashford 03:43**

So, Laura, can we see the results of the poll, please? Right, gosh, if you're asked to explain what neurodiversity is, we've got 'somewhat' is very much in the lead there, o a bit of knowledge, but definitely today, we could go a bit deeper on explaining and how well do you feel workplace supports neurodiverse teams and talents, satisfactorily, and poorly are winning out. So definitely lots to learn today on the lunch and learn. So that's brilliant. That's great. So Laura, if you could take that down, that'd be fantastic. As I've mentioned, we're very lucky to have professor Amanda Kirby here now. Amanda, could you just briefly introduce yourself and Rebecca and Jill, if you just say a quick hello at the beginning as well, that'd be great.

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 04:37**

Sure. Hi, everybody. Thank you very much for inviting me. I'm a professor worked in the field of neurodiversity for 30 years. I come from a neuro divergent family, children, grandchildren, and worked in clinical settings and chair of the ADHD Foundation, live, breathe neurodiversity, and dream it too.

**Suzy Bashford 04:59**

Perfect, thank you very much. Jill, could you just introduce yourself briefly, please?

**Jill Norris 05:04**

I can. Thanks, Suzy. So I'm Jill Norris, and I'm a senior diversity inclusion and OD consultant at NHS England. And I've been leading on accessibility assistive technology and reasonable adjustments for them for two and a half years now. So, yes, lots of experience, hopefully, that I'm gonna share with everybody here today. Thank you.

**Suzy Bashford 05:27**

Brilliant. And Rebecca, can you introduce yourself, please?

**Rebecca Smyth 05:31**

Yes, hello. Thanks for having me today. My name is Rebecca Smyth, and I am one of the customer account directors within the workplace division at Texthelp. So my kind of day to day job is helping our strategic customers, like lovely Jill from NHS England. And it's all about kind of supporting them to help them kind of get the read and write toolbar out there to all of their employees to really make a difference in their day to day working lives. I am probably one of them- I don't have as much experiences as the other speakers and I've been kind of in this field for coming up on two years now. So I'm excited to share some things with you today, as well as learn a bit myself.

**Suzy Bashford 06:12**

Brilliant and just to remind you, our webinar today is called How to create a workplace that celebrates and supports neurodiverse teams. And I should point out as well, we've got Closed Captions Enabled. So at the bottom of your screen, you should be able to see the little icon, the double CC for that if you want to enable them. And yet, as Claire says in the chat, you'll be getting a transcript, all the links and the recording afterwards. So let's without further ado, get started with the legend that is Professor Amanda Kirby. Welcome to the stage. Now I should manage expectations here. While we'd love her to speak for hours, she's got 15 minutes including your questions, which I'll be scanning the chat for. So over to you, Amanda, to set the context and give us a bit background.

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 07:01**

Yes, sure. So I'm going to probably talk too fast and try to give you too much information in too little time. But I'll try and do as much as I can. So I mentioned who I was but and I'm what I'm trying to do is talk to you about a bit about the words and how we use them. Because like in your poll, some people find that they're not sure what to say. And if you're not sure what to say, you don't have a conversation. And then if you don't have a conversation, we're not having a dialogue. And then we're avoiding because we feel uncomfortable. What are organisations, individuals experiences? I'm going to try and touch on that. And why should organisations become more neuro inclusive in 15 minutes with questions. So here I go. I've written lots of stuff. And as I said, I live and breathe this.

So let's start with a definition. What is neurodiversity? And some people say, Oh, that's autism, neurodiversity is not owned by a condition. We are all neuro diverse. We've got 84 billion brain cells connected in billions of different ways. So why would we be a box one box or another? Our brains don't know about those conditions. Okay, so what is neurodiversity? It's the way we all think, move, act and process information and communicate differently. And when we're talking about neuro divergence, we're talking about it from a social construct, that if I can't fit into education, if I've got a child, and they can't sit still, and I do have children and grandchildren who can't sit still, who may have difficulties writing or recording, or find it hard to recall information really quickly, or participate in sport, who can't read rapidly in class, then they are diverging from what's the social expectation in education, that's going to be a problem in employment, same sort of thing. We diverge from an interview process, where we're expected to answer the questions really quickly.

And we're judged on that even though our job has got nothing to do with rapid recall. In fact, we really don't want rapid recall, we probably want reflection, then we are diverging, and we can diverge

positively. Those are our talents and our strengths. That's what you want to do to get people into work doing what they can do. And we can have barriers to being successful. And that can be you that can be our approaches. It can be the things we do the way we're telling people about where to go and how to apply. And the adjustments, we're taking. It can be our attitudes, it can be me speaking too fast, and you'll not be able to understand what I'm saying. So it can be my fault in the sense of the way we're communicating to each other. Or maybe it's working and sending a piece of paper out that people can't read because it's all in jargon. Right?

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 09:35**

So neuro divergence is a social construct where we don't fit into society's expectations the way it's constructed. So we're gonna have lots of people all over the place. This is not rare. It's it's common, and we've got an you might have people in your workplace as you will supply chains, you're recruiting talent, like me, you may have children and you may be neurodivergent. So we're talking about 15 to 20%. Think about that bell curve, right? And the bell curve is society set up for the average person. But the reality is I haven't met an average person.

So most of us are actually have spiky profiles. None of us are great at everything. And if people say they are, I'm really worried about them. Most of all, some of us are really good at some stuff not so good at other stuff. And if we can maximise our talents, we get that fit to our workplace brilliant. But sometimes the environment we're putting ourselves in, causes challenges. So I get highly distractible, and I'm listening to everybody else's conversations. So I need to wear headphones, I need to be sitting somewhere away from everybody. Because I'm listening to everybody that's going on. I'm intensely interested. So the environment we put people in, makes you either engage or disengage. And we see that in children as we'll put them in the right environment or put them in the wrong environment. We either get them engaging or completely disengaging.

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 10:58**

So neurodiversity is it's all neuro divergence. If we diverge away from the social norm neuro minority, some people will say, I'm part of a neuro minority group, and some people want to be part of a group or tribe and say, Well, I you know, I recognise you because you're dyslexic, and I've got similar traits. And some people say we're neurotypical, if you travel through the middle, you travelled through the middle of education or employment, then you could be seen as neurotypical. So people use this framing, and it's very personal. And people describe themselves in different ways and there's no right or wrong, it's really important that we think about what's right for them.

So bell curve neurotypical, we can diverge positively, and if you're doing it, you're down this ends you're a premier footballer, there aren't many, you're super good at football, but you might be have a spiky profile and then not be able to spell or to read. You might be an actually brilliant at maths but can't get the ball right. And most of us are somewhere in different spiky profiles. The other thing is that you can be born with developmental conditions like dyslexia or dyspraxia, but you can acquire things in life, our brains change throughout our lives. We're not static, 39 years and 364 days didn't need glasses. 365 days suddenly, on my 40th birthday, I needed to wear glasses. So our hearing changes, our vision changes, we can have something goes on in our lives, that can change so we can acquire

neurodivergent traits throughout our lives and you can have dyslexia and Parkinson's, your brain doesn't go got one can only have one. That's enough, right? So that's really important.

So when we're in the workplace busy slide, the point is, let's take a person centred approach. It's not that autistic people need headphones or someone on the autism spectrum and dyslexic people need beige paper, we need to move away from that. The task you're in, the job you do is going to make it different to the adjustments you need. If you're a surgeon, operating, you'll need something different from a firefighter going into a burning building, you might both be dyslexic, right? Really important to think about being person centred. The other bit, a lot of you might be Mental Health First Aiders, you might be trained in mental health, we've got one brain, just remember that.

So when you're thinking about neurodiversity over here, and mental health in your workplaces, just really think about that one brain. Very people, view people with just one. So when they say this phrase, when you met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism, when when you met one person, you've met one person, right, per se, okay. And the reality is that 60% of people with autism will have dyspraxia, 25- 40% of people with autism will have ADHD, yet, we always talk about autistic initiatives as if that's for those people. And we're done. And you may have people across a spectrum who might be verbal, nonverbal, have a PhD, still have functional difficulties, not have functional difficulties, have children, be single, we're a mess, we really are, we're messy people. And we love to put ourselves into those boxes.

So we're starting to flip the narrative and moving away from things like deficit and disorder and disability to go. Okay, there are reasons why we've got these neurodivergent traits in society. That's why the genes have stayed. I come from a vastly neurodivergent family on both sides and married somebody as well. So the apple doesn't fall from the tree. We've got different skills and talents across our family. Okay, not superpowers, I think we've got to be careful about that narrative that everybody who's got a neurodivergent trait is amazing at, there's lots of people who are quite good at, or a bit good at, you know, that we're human, you know, in that sort of sense. Some people have great talents. And we've got to move away from the biases and sort of say, you need to you need to hire people on the autism spectrum, because they're all good at it. Not everybody on the autism spectrum is good at it, interested in it or wants to work in it.

So let's just challenge those biases as well. And really thinking about not everybody gets a diagnosis, right, you have to be bad enough to get it, you have to fit that threshold. And if you're just below it, then you don't get a diagnosis, right? And nothing's nothing. So that's no good. So we need a universal design process which says, Let's be person centred support an individual. And the other thing, there's a huge postcode lottery across the UK, there's waiting lists in some places for some conditions, and no services and the other, remembering all these things overlap with each other. And there's a bias, you get more more provision with some labels than you do with others. You get more acceptance with some labels than you do with others who've got the wrong label, or the wrong traits. People don't know anything about it.

So you have something like developmental language disorder, which is far more common than autism. Lots of people go DLD, what is that? Even though seven and a half percent of people have DLD. Just

think about lots of people are coming along and saying, I think I might be diagnosed, should I get a diagnosis? There's no, you're the same person the day before and day after. But not everybody wants to tell, share, disclose. So we've got to be careful about challenging our biases, that two people with the same diagnosis are very different and ask people what does this mean for you? What can I do for you to support you, not by label, but just like we do? Tell me more about yourself? That's the best question we can ask. And not everyone's coming with a diagnosis. There are lots of people are being misunderstood and misdiagnosed females, particularly til relatively recently, we're looking for a real male lens. And that's why we're identifying lots of males. It's a bit like looking for horses, but missing out on zebras. We've all got a spiky profile.

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 16:41**

And there's five reasons for being good for business. One is attracting not wasting talent. Two is retaining the talent. Three is novelty, why don't we we aren't culture fit, we want culture mix, that's we really need to keep ourselves ahead in society. People want to have people, you should want it to be neuro inclusive, and the stick is don't get litigated. There's the Equality Act 2010, which is 13 years old. There are also other acts that you need to comply with, I haven't got time to talk about. Think about your current processes and think about the context you're putting and most approaches don't cost a lot. Think about universal design and everything you do. Who are you excluding? What talent are you missing by the things that you're doing? And really think about always framing performance equals potential minus interference? What are you doing to stop somebody's performance being optimal? What interferences are you putting in place, we can help you with a neurodiversity? And today, hopefully, later on today, we're bringing out a neuro diversity index barometer with City and Guilds. We've been asking lots of people, 1000s of people and employers, and we're going to be reporting on the findings, which are really interesting, and will be shared with you, and the report will come out and we can let you know.

**Suzy Bashford 17:57**

Amanda just a quick question there. There was somebody saying what exactly are the three M's again?

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 18:02**

missing, misunderstood, misdiagnosed, so those are people who move around the system, those are people who've got the wrong diagnosis, because we've got diagnostic overshadowing, like getting a diagnosis of anxiety and depression when they've had an underlying ADHD, autism or dyspraxia, for example, and misunderstood. So we've got people, children who get put out of into in alternative provision, for example, seen as behaviour, there is no diagnosis or behaviour just telling you that and not being considered for developmental language disorder, ADHD, or other reasons.

**Suzy Bashford 18:36**

I'm conscious that we're nearly on our time with you. But we got another question in there, as you were talking about how do employers best support such employees? Obviously, massive question, but I know your books are very strong on the practicals. If you had to give a few practical suggestions, where would employers start?

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 18:56**

One, go to senior leadership. So really buy in from the top to say, This is important. Things to think about, universal design, you don't want to do retro fitting, so you really want to go, Okay, how do we make recruitment inclusive? And just test it who could be up excluding in your processes and policies? Then really ask people in your organisation, they're there already, ask them what's working, what's not. So gaining feedback, and listen to that and be critical and keep reviewing having that cycle? So in going back to that slide, that's sort of the stages you could do, really across a year. You could have a or several years to embed it. Yeah. But think about who you're the talent you're locking. You don't know who doesn't apply for your job.

So just be really critical about that. And I quite like doing personas, if somebody was visually impaired, could they apply, if somebody was hearing impaired? Could they apply if somebody couldn't speak to you? Could they understand what you're saying? And by creating those personas, it gets you to challenge them and that's true. If they couldn't read well, they wouldn't know to read this document.

**Suzy Bashford 19:59**

Monika made a good point as well in the church she was talking about how do you create an office that supports better for all if solutions, by definition also need to be personalised? What about that?

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 20:10**

Yeah well, interesting. In a in an office the other day, somebody said, Well, we voted that 70% have the radio on. So that's good enough for us all. It's not. Right. 30% of the votes have not voted yes. So don't take that as a majority, because that's why we're not inclusive. So we can have headphones. So in an office situation, if you want headphones, you could have noise cancelling to cut out the noise, or you could have music on the radio for blaring in your ears, if you wanted to Radio One or radio to whichever is your preference to listen to that, and then take them off to have a conversation. So we have to think about everybody not just doing it for the majority, because the majority is the average, you know, and that excludes lots of people, and you're gonna lose people. And they won't only leave, they will quietly quit as well. And you're losing great talent. So just reflective of that. And we need talent more than ever.

**Suzy Bashford 21:06**

And one of our points was to look at stereotypes and challenge stereotypes and stigmas and things. And you've actually talked about before how universal design by by itself. It's a very good way of doing this. Can you just talk to that point quickly?

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 21:19**

Yeah, so the the problem being when we have a cookie cutter mentality that we go, we've done it for dyslexics. Now we do it for Autistics, and we do it for ADHD, that won't work, right? Because people are, first of all, not everybody is going to come with a diagnosis. So the stereotype of our now I know who you are, now I know what you get, won't work, right. The other thing is that people will be challenged, will be worried. If I share information about myself, I may not progress in this organisation, or because of those stereotypes, you're going to think that I'm less than, different from, can't do. And I've got loads of examples of that. So we have to challenge that. And I think the other bit is we've got to

move away from you know, dyslexic people are all creative, and autistic people are all good at IT. These are, examples of good fit. So sometimes getting people with the good skills into the right jobs is the talent fit you want. That's what we're talking about. Not saying put these people here.

**Suzy Bashford 22:15**

Yeah. And on that point of getting people into the right jobs. What about helping new joiners, say who have a diagnosis? And when they're asked how they want to be supported they don't actually know?

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 22:28**

Yeah, so the other thing is, people have that sort of view that they're going to tell me what they need, they're bound to know. But if I've never done the job before, how do I know what I need? If I've never been in your organisation? And I don't know, who makes the tea? I've seen tea wars erupt in organisations, who uses the kettle, if you use that mug, all those sorts of things, if I don't know those rules, and you've got lots of jargon, and terms you're using, I don't know what to ask for. So sometimes it has to be an iterative process of having a conversation, a bit like any manager will do. How are you getting on? Do you need some support? Is there any training needs you have? This is a conversation we all have and should have, checking in and then reviewing it, and it may change, a new line manager, new job, we saw it in COVID didn't we, we're suddenly working from home, we're changing the environment where we're working in, that might need to be reviewed. So it's a conversation we should be having ongoing rather than go We've done it now. Tick. Yeah, those we've given you the kit. Off you go now you should be done now. It's a conversation we should be having on a regular basis to see, are there any training needs, are there any support needs to support you optimally? And that's all.

**Suzy Bashford 23:39**

The questions are coming thick and fast. I'm sorry, we can't get through to all of them. But we will download the chat and we will follow up I promise. There's one more question we've got time for before we move into the next session at the section. And that's you've mentioned women and neurodiversity. What about, what's the intersectionality with race and ethnicity? Any thoughts on that Amanda?

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 24:00**

I've always got lots of thoughts.

**Suzy Bashford 24:04**

In fact, it's quite funny. Some people are saying we're going too fast. Some people are saying it's perfect.

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 24:09**

I know I'm going too fast.

**Suzy Bashford 24:11**

I know, I know, you've got so much to get through.

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 24:14**



So yes, so the first thing is people, right? And systems are inequitable. And it means that some people are not getting to the services and the support they require. And there is inequity in the system in terms of access. So intersectionality is, it's about inequity, that the people who know how to access systems know where to go. And predominantly that's been white middle class males who've got the diagnosis in the past, of a variety of things. It's about challenging that and ensuring that our systems are accessible. And inclusive means everybody gets the same opportunity to get the support they require. And this isn't about neurodiversity. None of this is about neurodiversity. It's about people in the end.

**Suzy Bashford 24:58**

Yeah. Thank you so much, Amanda. That was brilliant. And we did cover a huge amount of ground in that 15 minutes and set the scene for really going in deeper on this conversation. We're now going to hand over to Jill. Now this is brilliant because we've gone from the setting the scene to Jill is at the coalface working for the NHS, like we are talking huge scale, huge complexity. And she's grappling with all of these things on the coalface. So Jill over to you, can you tell us about how you put this theory into action, please.

**Jill Norris 25:32**

I can thank you. And thank you, Rebecca, because she's gonna do a fabulous job of moving my slides along. But basically, I'm here to talk a little bit about NHS England's ever evolving journey. And so, you know, we've done a vast amount of work to support our neurodiverse colleagues, with the ethos of Nothing about us without us. And over the next 10-15 minutes, I'll try and be quick, because I'm very passionate about this topic area. It's about three years worth of work and a couple of slides so you can appreciate we are going at pace. But I'm going to kind of cover that holistic organisational approach that we've taken, really focusing in on in the collaboration with our corporate teams and staff networks in order to kind of drive improvement. So with that I will get Rebecca to move me on to the next slide, which is a lovely picture of me talking about my values, and my personal slogan, which is make every contact count. Every time I'm in a room, there's always an opportunity to kind of celebrate, learn or share success in any topic area. So there's one thing I would say today as a takeaway, please take that as a takeaway.

**Jill Norris 26:41**

Next slide, please. So there's a lot of information on this slide. But this is a little bit of that overview around our journey and improvement so far. So the first thing I want to talk about is all of this was done in collaboration with our staff networks. And we kind of had to take it right the way back to kind of grassroots. So we knew that we needed to really improve our reasonable adjustments process. Now, obviously, that was ensuring that we had guidance that covered the onboarding journey, the application journey, how to support people when they come into the organisation, and make sure that we've got the tools and resources that individuals are able to access, whether they're self serving, or whether it's a line manager that understands their key roles and responsibilities in relation to support and colleagues. But more importantly, we wanted to make sure that we had a feedback loop that was built in on that. And I'll come on to that again in a little second. But we really focus on improving the onboarding process. And a lot of this was about scaling up the workforce. So we're very conscious that you know, when you've got recruiting managers and line managers who can sometimes be two totally different people, that sometimes things can get missed. So we really wanted to emphasise the point of when

we're onboarding our colleagues, make every contact count and ensure that templates are shared with the new employee, that HR business partners and the recruiting and line managers really emphasise and push reasonable adjustments and accessibility at the front and say, We're an organisation that supports this and want to assure that we can give you the tools to enable you to do the best job. And there are certain touch points that we've put in along the way. So you'll see here I talked about the IT Newstarter form.

**Jill Norris** 28:25

On the second point then, because we even pushed it in everybody's face again, it say have you had a reasonable adjustments, conversation with the individual that you're on board and what support the the need. If you need any additional advice or you're unsure, please come through a reasonable adjustments process where we can obviously give that more detailed and depth, discussion pointers, signpost and to ensure that we are giving that person the best start in the organisation. Now fast forward to that collaborative work with our staff networks to drive.

**Suzy Bashford** 28:57

jJust a quick question there. Jill, we've had something about which self networks in particular did you partner with for this journey?

**Jill Norris** 29:04

We've got a dawn network, which is our disability awareness network. But although our Dawn network, there are subgroups, and we've got to learn in different subgroups. And so we work closely with our Dawn network, and they were learning different subgroups. And those were the groups that helped us kind of challenge and push in these topic areas and made sure that we collaborate. And that whole Nothing about us was I was so point three, then really bringing forward you know, we knew that we were massively underrepresented. And this was some work that we did with the British Dyslexia Association. And when assistive technology showed us that we only had 26 licensees out of 15,000 employees for our regionwide software.

And so when we kind of started to delve into that we did a bigger piece of work with our learning difference network. And what we've done as a result is we've globally deployed the regionwide software across the whole organisation, and that software obviously supports colleagues with a variety of neurodiverse needs and has lots of tools that can really support them and their working day will be globally deployed, that's what's available. And people don't have to self disclose if they don't want to. So that was something that was really important for us. But obviously, it was there and everybody's able to access it on their laptop. And there is a key resource and training that's available with that. Then something linked with obviously, Professor Amanda Kirby is the profiler. So we recognise that across the organisation, we have a lot of colleagues who weren't screened and still didn't have that support and assessment. And basically, they weren't then eligible for access to work, because they didn't have that confirmed assessment.

And so what we found was, we needed to do something as an organisation to support our colleagues who are coming forward and saying, I need some help. And let's do a profile or two, as a neurodiverse screening tool that Amanda talked a little bit about, it gives us spiky profile, and it really brings to the

forefront areas that individuals do well, areas that maybe individuals feel that they need extra support. And, and it's got a kind of comprehensive outcome report that really starts to have that great conversation with the individual and the line manager, and in order to support them and their day to day role, and also help them to achieve their full potential.

**Suzy Bashford 31:21**

And do you find that that's opened up the conversation as well? You said you rolled out Read and Write across the whole organisation you've made do it profiler much more available? Are you finding then that things like stigma or reluctance to talk or reluctance to disclose what's happening there?

**Jill Norris 31:37**

I still think that that's something that we will continually work on as an organisation. And you know, our figures that come from our, our staff surveys, etc, highlight that the people that don't feel that they want to self disclose and come forward, because they may not feel confident in that. And that's something that we'll continually try and break down those barriers to support colleagues with, I think that, you know, you can never, you know, what we are presenting here on this slide is trying to embed a culture of, we want everybody to come to work and do their best job and have all the tools that they need to enable them to do that. But you know, I think that's something we'll continually strive for. I don't think anybody can tick that box and walk away from that.

**Jill Norris 32:23**

So we do have them specialist subject matter expertise around our assistive technology. So you know, we made sure we put a service in place around assistive tech, because we didn't write is one kind of assistive tech tool. But there's a whole host of other assistive technology that supports our colleagues with neurodiverse needs. And therefore we need to make sure that because that software really supports colleagues in the workplace, we need to ensure that they have a service that can support them event that happens with that, and also that our corporate IT team are scaled up and understand more about assistive technology, which is something that we are continually working on.

**Jill Norris 32:58**

And then what I'll do is if you could flip to the next slide, please, Rebecca, we've got a digital accessibility hub, which is what you can see here. So this is effectively a SharePoint page, which is a one stop shop hub, where we drive all our line managers and colleagues to, to access key content around reasonable adjustments, such as our guidance, the process to make a reasonable adjustment request, our read and write software, which is the global deployment with all the gains, the key tools, features and training sessions. The do it profiler is something that's an ever evolving piece for us. So we had a small number, and we're actually about to do a bigger launch on that, because we're doing some improvement work in that space. And that's something that's that neurodiverse screening tool. And then you can see that we've got the digital accessibility hub and our staff passport, which is our workplace passport, and staff networks. So it's really just driving everybody to that one stop shop.

**Suzy Bashford 33:50**

And on that point, can I just bring Professor Amanda Kirby back in because obviously do it profiler you're very right in saying is her baby. Amanda, just listening to Jill, I wondered if you had any thoughts,

feedback, anything about what Jill's been saying? And particularly obviously, you know about do it profiler?

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 34:18**

I muted myself. Two seconds. Sorry.

**Suzy Bashford 34:25**

You're back. So just wondering your thoughts on what I was saying there?

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 34:29**

Yeah, yeah. So and it's great that they're using the way that they're using it because that is absolutely the way. One of the things of the last few years of developing it and we're continually improving it is looking at those strengths. So it generates a report that highlights strengths as well as challenges, which means people can work with those strengths. And we've got wellbeing tools as well, like I said, one brain, so thinking about what's going on in your life, thinking about the context of your job. So it's a dynamic tool, rather than it getting you to say you're X or Y I it's helping people to embed that and it's translatable and accessible. So it's great because the more we work in organisations where anybody can have those sorts of conversations, it means it doesn't become a big thing to share. It's not about the diagnosis here. This is about helping person centred and supporting the person in the workplace. That's, that's absolutely the position we're taking.

**Suzy Bashford 35:24**

Brilliant. And Jill, did you want to add anything?

**Jill Norris 35:27**

If I can, so we could go back to the previous slide, Rebecca. So just to kind of round off there are some key things on the end here to share. So as part of our accessibility journey across NHS England, I've written a strategy, along with some of our corporate key team players, and we have an accessibility steering group, where we have the heads across all of our corporate teams come together along with our staff networks.

And we have a really robust plan employee that we did as a part of a disability smart self assessment, through the Business Disability Forum, it gave us our gap analysis. And it's allowed us to create a plan across key areas across the business like our state, so what HR, our OD, our IT, and we're really obviously making a lot of headway there. That's a really exciting piece of work for the organisation. That was kind of everything to kind of flag if we step forward two slides, I won't talk through them. So I appreciate time. But we basically have some guiding principles that come out of our strategy, that really drive home about person centred approach involving everybody, making sure that we collaborate, we create and shape a new culture in our organisation, and that we learn from best practice. And we share, I think the key thing from you to end here today, we don't always get it right, there's always much more to learn, and we'll always striving to do better. And that's something we'll continue to do. But this was the whistle stop tour of kind of three years worth of work in that kind of 10-15 minutes. So thank you for giving me the time to come along today. And, and present that to you.

**Suzy Bashford 37:04**

Thank you very much for coming. That was brilliant, and brilliantly on time, because we are bang on going into our final section with Rebecca. And what's great is we started off with Amanda's setting the scene, we've had Jill, looking at the coal face, the challenges of a big organisation like the NHS. Now we're gonna welcome Rebecca to the stand to tell us about introducing a few more examples. And also, looking more at the industry wide perspective, perhaps a couple more case studies, different sizes of companies, she's well placed to look at all sorts of clients sizes and sectors working in this area. So Rebecca, welcome to the webinar, please share your thoughts.

**Rebecca Smyth 37:48**

Thank you very much. And thanks again for having me. So probably what I'll do is the we've we've had so so much already, and so many great kind of stats and tips and tricks. So if you'll allow me the executive decision, there may be kind of a few of the setting the scene slides that I'll kind of skip over. And we've had our introductions, and you don't need to see me twice, once is definitely enough. So we'll skip over that. And I suppose any stats or any reports that I'm referencing today, just just a reminder that we will drop the links and everything into the chat. And obviously, they will be available as well after today, with the slides and everything that's going to get shared after. But I suppose to kind of put it into a bit of perspective, a few stats, I'll pick out, you know, the likes of 76% of people with a disability or neurodiverse condition, do not fully disclose this at work. And in line with that nearly half of employees with disabilities or conditions do not feel comfortable to approach their employer to ask for change. And this really is why it is important that companies do take the kind of proactive approach to have assistive technology and a variety of of different software's and supports available to everyone from the offset. And this is going to be a good step in the right direction to have kind of an inclusive workplace.

**Rebecca Smyth 39:13**

So next is also again, a stat that we're all very familiar with. But I suppose it's just to kind of flag that this one in five stat does mean that there's a potential that a fifth of your workforce could have a condition or range of conditions such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism, or ADHD. So it's really getting into that kind of mindset them to think about these people and how best you can support them and change your workplace to help. Next, and so this is a study that Texthelp conducted last year, and we got a good number. Got good feedback on a number of reasons why people wouldn't fully disclose their condition at work. And again, the link will be here to read the full report, but some kind of staggering facts, you know, nearly half thought that it would negatively affect their career prospects, if they did disclose their condition at work. And nearly a third, would prefer not to share personal information with their employers. So, the takeaway from this poll is that many workplace cultures, as we know, are not inclusive of everyone, and we need to change, as has kind of been said before, you know, morally, it is the right thing to do. And from that business perspective, it's going to be key to your survival, your growth, and kind of, you know, just being an employer of choice.

**Rebecca Smyth 40:35**

So, we've talked about this before, but let's kind of take a look at the skills required for kind of the future way of work and how everything is moving forward. So to kind of name a few and pick a few things off the screen there reasoning, connecting, exploring, communication, imagining and visualising. So that's

just a small selection of the skills that are going to be needed for the future. It's kind of the skills that a neuro inclusive workplaces can benefit from. So people with neuro diversities can think in a way that is truly unique. And you know, everybody will have talents to kind of pull together. And you know, from from the screen there, let's face it, you know, what workplace wouldn't want colleagues that have, you know, a set of skills like that. And again, Professor Amanda Kirby has spoken about this. So it's just kind of reiterating that there's going to be huge business benefits for creating a neuro inclusive working environment, what we have there, an increased return on investment, attract and retain the best talent, better decision making, and a more engaged workforce. And again, as I said, you know, everything in this working environment is always changing. We've seen that definitely over the last few years. So knowing that you have those benefits at the core of your organisation is going to make you an employer of choice and allow you to succeed.

**Rebecca Smyth 41:56**

One final stat from me then, and this is a recent survey that was carried out by Deloitte, the global human capital trends. And it stated that over 90% of business leaders believe that using technology to improve work outcomes, and team performance is either very important or important to their successes. So this leads me nicely then into what businesses can do to start benefiting from the technology that's already available. As Suzy said, then I want to talk a bit about some measures that our current partners are taking to ensure they're supporting their whole workforce.

**Rebecca Smyth 42:34**

So first up, we have I'll just flick all these on so you can see everything on the screen. And one of the many partners that I have the pleasure of working with is Kevin from EY. And Kevin is responsible for managing all the assistive tech there. And last year, he shared three key tips with us that I thought were kind of worth highlighting. So use technology as a tool to empower the worker. And this is you know, great advice, because technology has the power to remove barriers and unlock talent in your workplace. Next, understand that technology can also boost confidence. So technology such as inclusion tools, like read and write can help proofread, find advanced spelling and grammar errors, they can remove distractions and just allow the user to really focus on the task instead of worrying about kind of any mistakes that they make or have made. And finally, then realise that the impact of technology is greater than the individual. Technology that supports an individual will have that ripple effect on the rest of the team and business. So when that employee has the tools to fully engage, they're going to contribute and influence their team and kind of what's happening in the business.

**Rebecca Smyth 43:48**

Next up, then, we have KPMG. So another one of our partners, and they have shared five tips for achieving an inclusive workplace. And I should say again, we have detailed reports on all of these, I'm here to just kind of give the the high level tips and tricks so we can share all the reports and everything after for these as well. So number one on KPMG's list is educate others and challenge stigma. What they do is they educate their teams on being able to understand and recognise neurodivergent traits. So this is going to help their employees to understand what they can start or stop doing to help and not hinder a neurodivergent colleague.

**Rebecca Smyth 44:33**

Next up, be transparent. So ideally, walk the walk, not just talk the talk and publish your endeavours. Try to keep everybody informed as best you can, and meet them, you know, allow them to come along on that journey with you. Next, make it easy for staff to ask for change, but don't make it necessary. Again, as we've already heard, not everybody is going to want to disclose. So the more you can offer as standard, the better basically.

**Rebecca Smyth 45:01**

Number four is create a buddy system. So this is pretty self explanatory work colleagues can volunteer to buddy one another. So it's going to give neurodivergent colleagues a dedicated resource and peer to confide in if they want to. And finally, I haven't put this in this is KPMG. But work with partners. And obviously, you know, we're one of one of KPMG partners. And their idea behind this is that that's going to help to improve on what you do and how you do it. And there's great learnings to be had with different partners, the likes of KPMG, obviously ourselves, but they also work with Business Disability Forum, Oticon. UK, to name a few. So as you can see from from those five tips, you know, KPMG, really places being inclusive at the heart of everything they do. And I'll not go through that quote, that Neil Eustace, who is the accessibility manager has said, but it's just that idea that it's focusing on people and focusing on them flourishing both as professionals and as individuals.

**Rebecca Smyth 46:07**

And finally, just one more quote is from Sainsbury's. So again, another big household name that we're all familiar with. And again, this is something that, inclusion is something that they're really, really committed to. And it's not only the right thing to do, it's also central to the performance as a business. So if anybody has any other questions on any of those kind of case studies and tips and tricks, just just let us know, and drop any questions in the chat.

**Rebecca Smyth 46:33**

So moving on, at a at a lightning pace, but that was really just a whistlestop tour of a small sample of what our wonderful partners are doing. And if you'll allow me a few more minutes, I wanted to link this into how then Texthelp are supporting them achieve their goals, and talk about then how we can help you maximise your talent in the organisation as well. So we've we've talked about read and write, and Jill has mentioned that as well. So what is it, is is a good question, put very easily, it's the main way we help hundreds of organisations support their whole staff network. It's an inclusion tool that supports people who think learn and work differently. And it offers instant and discreet support to all employees without the need to self identify. Texthelp is a global company that is, with all our inclusion tools is supporting over 200 million people worldwide. And read or write alone supports over 40 million people. So we're trying to we're trying to get more and more. So I'll talk about that a bit at the at the end.

**Rebecca Smyth 47:40**

I really don't want this to be any sort of product demonstration. That's not what today's about. But I just thought I would put this slide in to sort of highlight a few of the different features that are available on the toolbar, you know, picking a few there. Text to Speech allows users to have their texts be read out loud, we have our checkout tool, which is our advanced dyslexia friendly spell checker, and also say, you know, our dictation tool that allows you to translate spoken words into digital text. So I'll not go into

any more detail on that. But honestly, do feel free to reach out. We can chat through your requirements, we can show you the software.

**Suzy Bashford 48:16**

On that note, Rebecca, I was just gonna say as you've mentioned, a couple of great names, great big case studies. What about, I understand you work with people of all sizes, all organisations? Is there much difference between the way you implement strategies say at a big accountancy firm to a smaller organisation?

**Rebecca Smyth 48:35**

No, there's there's really no difference because we want to try and help as many people as possible, whether that be, you know, 10 smaller organisations with 100 people or kind of the big names that you know, we have mentioned, so, obviously, and I will go on to it, but we we work with each organisation to tailor, kind of a strategy, that's going to fit them fit their communication style and fit their employees. So, no, it's we try to kind of give dedication and support to everyone in an equal way.

**Suzy Bashford 49:06**

And you mentioned challenging stigma, obviously, huge issues. Obviously, we mentioned a couple of times today, but have you had any other learnings past what you just said there about challenging stigma in different kinds of organisations?

**Rebecca Smyth 49:21**

I think actually probably one of the biggest learnings for me personally is that stigma is everywhere. It's you know, it's not in small organisations. It's not in big organisations.

**Suzy Bashford 49:33**

That's what I was wondering.

**Rebecca Smyth 49:34**

Yeah, it's not in it's not in just the finance sector. It's not in the government sector. It's, you know, it's everywhere. And I suppose that probably is why we have that blanket sort of strategy to try and help everybody because it's there throughout.

**Suzy Bashford 49:51**

Professor Amanda Kirby was nodding her head there if I could just bring you in again. Amanda, do you agree with that the fact that stigma is there everywhere?

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 50:00**

I do I think, you know, just put it in chat as well. So I think that sometimes it's about naivety, it's not intent, you know, I think that's really important is that we might have biases, just because we don't know, or we assume things. So I always think it's not malicious, quite often. It's naive, well I hope it's not, it's there, because people don't know or they've haven't had the experience. They haven't had maybe family members, and they're coming with just a lack of knowledge. And when they're engaging and going, Okay, well, that would help me. So like, you know, this is a great tool useful for everybody,



right? So you start breaking down the barriers and saying good communication is good for all right, using technology can help everybody, we start to go back to those universal design principles, which says, you know, I use the escalator to get me to the top, I could use the stairs, but I don't, you know, actually flips the narrative, which says, all of us might need support have different sorts of different times, let's look at what we've got in common rather than what we've got different.

**Suzy Bashford** 51:03

Yeah, brilliant. Back to, Rebecca, is there something you wanted to finish off on there?

**Rebecca Smyth** 51:08

Yeah, just a few more slides. So I'll be quick. I won't go through this video. But it was kind of just to hit on the fact that, obviously, I can tell you that everything we do is great. And everything our partners do is great. But if you do get a chance, there's a video there from one of the toolbars end users, and Deirdre who has a really impactful video that can help kind of explain it from an end user point of view. And quickly, just an initiative that we've started is this, what we call Read and Write free for family. So we're working with kind of all our sitewide or enterprise partners to offer the ability to extend DE&I goals out to further support colleagues, by offering them the opportunity to nominate a family member who can also benefit from using read and write. So as we all know, studies have shown that there's hereditary link there to many neurodiverse conditions. So we realised that, you know, read and write users within a workplace may have a family member that could benefit from the tool as well. So and it's completely free. It doesn't cost the end user, it doesn't cost the organisation anything. It's something that we're trying to really just help the wider kind of network and support as many people as possible.

**Rebecca Smyth** 52:26

And very quickly, then, I suppose we've already touched on this, but it's kind of about our partnership and the kind of the day to day operations. And I'll kind of quickly put this up, as, as I've said, you know, we're going to work with you as much as possible, we know that companies are like people, and no two companies are the same. So we're going to work with you to look at your success metrics against kind of versus your objectives. And we can tailor communication strategies, resources to kind of make sure you're going to have the highest usage and adoption rates as possible. And as a whole, really, it is all about working together. You know, obviously there is the kind of the focus on maximising our partnership, by kind of collaboration, one of the ways we do that is getting a lot of valuable feedback from organisations from end users. And that we feed that into our product roadmap to help with innovation of the product. So nearly at the end, don't worry, we so I've chatted about what we have done what we're currently doing. So I thought kind of fitting to finish on where we want to get to. And that's our main shot so that we will be supporting 1 billion people with our inclusion tools by 2030. Seems like a big task. But honestly, with kind of the collaboration and support from proactive and inclusive organisations like yourselves, I truly believe that we can we can get there.

**Suzy Bashford** 53:49

That's a great ambition. Yeah. Where are you on that?

53:54

Over 200 million so far. So we have we have a lot of end users in the education sector as well as the workplace sector. So kind of around both of them. Were at 200 million. So we're getting there.

**Suzy Bashford 54:07**

Yeah, great initiative. I'll definitely be looking into the free family. So well done. You have finished up on time as well. We have minutes left. I know it's flown by and I know we've gone fast. And we will take on board all the feedback about that, but got to make the most of these brilliant panellists. So with the last five minutes, there was a question that came up that I didn't get to earlier that I thought was really good around - And this is for all of you -Hybrid working to what extent has this been a benefit in this space? Or does it present its own challenges? Who would like to take that first? Yes, go for it.

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 54:46**

I think it's an interesting when we're talking about hybrid working I think we need to challenge what are we talking about? Because in some organisations become a formula to say three days of work two days of work and work comes a fixed formula. That's the problem. So if we start to see actually inclusion, then we can see that some people need to work at home all the time, you might have a physical disability, that means you are in bed some of the time, you might have multiple sclerosis, where you've got relapsing and remitting fatigue, and that actually, commuting is going to be one step too many, but you could have brilliant skills, you could work from home. So you could do eight hours, but you can't do 10 hours with a commute on top. So then that person is actually home working is the best solution. You've got other people who are, I have a remote team, we log in every morning, have a conversation, we've got Skype going, and all sorts of ways of engaging. So it's not a like either, or, and I think this sort of formulaic approach to hybrid working, is not good. And we do have this sort of build back better, build back better never is a good idea. We need to build forward better considering what are we learned from this like today, you were here, now, we've got closed captioning, we've got chat, we can put our hands up, we've got transcriptions. There's lots of things we gaining from using technology in different ways to offer us a hybrid solution for engagement. And we need to work out what's right for each organisation.

**Suzy Bashford 56:18**

And Amanda, you've got a very strong view, I know this on the fact that some companies are saying, right, two days back in the office, that's it. And you're thinking No, this is not a good way to go, are you

**Prof. Amanda Kirby 56:29**

No because it's the same thing. It's like saying, you know, all people should have the same size chairs or kitchen should be designed for in one height, which they are, which is ridiculous when I've got a 6ft husband and I'm five foot two. So again, this sort of very fixed thinking only suits the average person. And by the definition, lots of people it's not suiting, you've got to think of the task, the individual and the environment, and optimise all three.

**Suzy Bashford 56:56**

That's interesting I'm sure a lot of the audience will be sitting there thinking my company's got a policy where we have to be in, maybe that's worth challenging. Jill and Rebecca, anything to add on the hybrid?

**Jill Norris** 57:08

And it's just we've had seen so much advancement, so much more engagement. And so again, you've got to look at an individual person centred approach. But you know, how far we've advanced over the last couple of years is also something to celebrate. And I think you know, our digital adoption and, you know, deploying a lot of new solutions that have really enabled and supported colleagues has been something that we've certainly received a lot of positive feedback from our staff networks, still, it seems to feel more engaged, they feel seen a bit more and that they're able to participate in, they don't feel that there's too much, and stigma or discrimination, they feel that they're able to flourish. But like you said, it's something that you will always work towards, because there's never one fit that fits every party. It's not one size fits all in this approach.

**Suzy Bashford** 57:55

What about Rebecca? Sorry, to interrupt, you've got a couple of notes.

**Rebecca Smyth** 57:59

Listen, I feel like a lot has been said, but yeah, I suppose it's, I suppose it's that idea that it's, you know, it's just, it's not just kind of working from home or working in the office between set hours. It's the flexible working, that is something that kind of Texthelp. And it's it's, you know, a pleasure to be part of an organisation like that, that is very aware that everybody is different. Everybody has different lifestyles, different commitments. And it's that idea that as long as you're comfortable with how you're working, you're going to improve, you're going to put out a better quality of work as well.

**Suzy Bashford** 58:27

So to wrap up, the last question is one practical tip. We go to Amanda, the legend that is Amanda.

**Prof. Amanda Kirby** 58:35

I feel like I need to go to have a sleep now. One tip, just being respectfully curious, I think if you're respectful in the way that we engage with each other, and ask questions in a way that invites a conversation, we won't make mistakes, and we can learn all the time from each other.

**Suzy Bashford** 59:01

Fantastic. Thank you so much, Amanda, Jill, Rebecca. It's been a whirlwind. I think you'll agree and fantastic panellists, so much information there. So as well as the panel, thank you to our sponsor, Texthelp and the brilliant ambitions that you're living by and of course, thank you to everybody that turned up today. We really appreciate it. Thanks so much. Thanks very much. Bye