

2024 NONPROFIT
LEADERSHIP
CONFERENCE



May 8, 2024
Minneapolis



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Employing and Supporting Neurodiverse Employees

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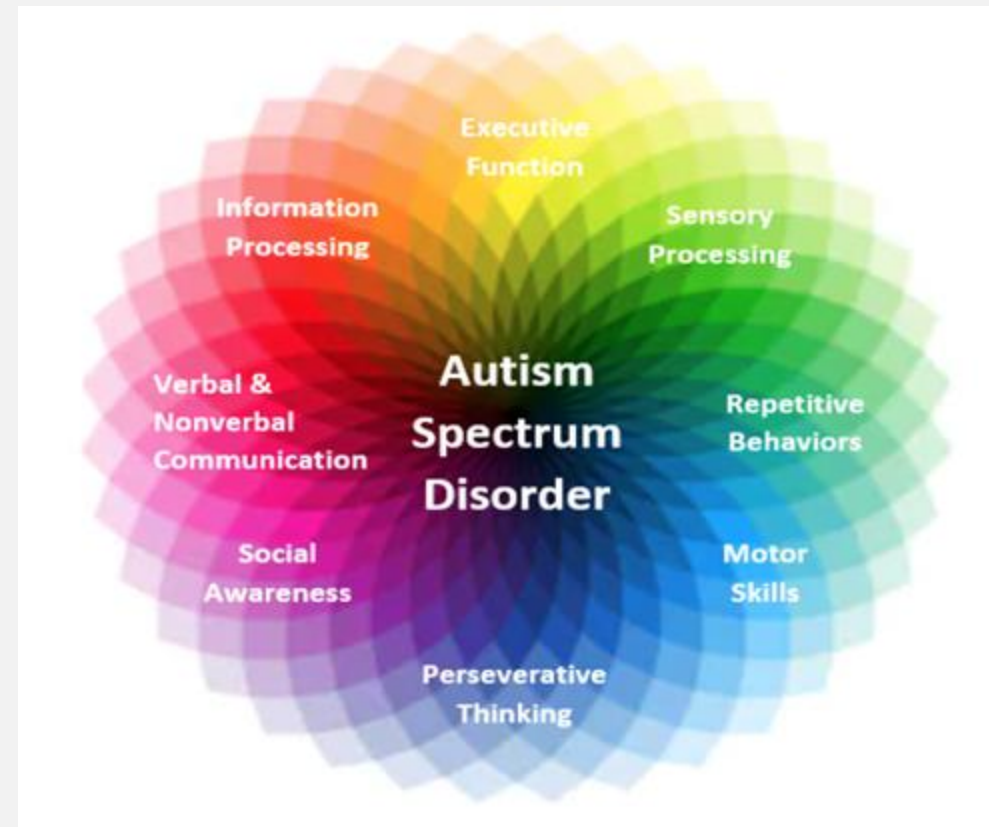
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Are you or any of your coworkers neurodiverse? Chances are the answer is yes. Approximately 20% of the population is neurodiverse, regardless of demographics. However, there's a reason you might not know if your coworkers are neurodiverse.

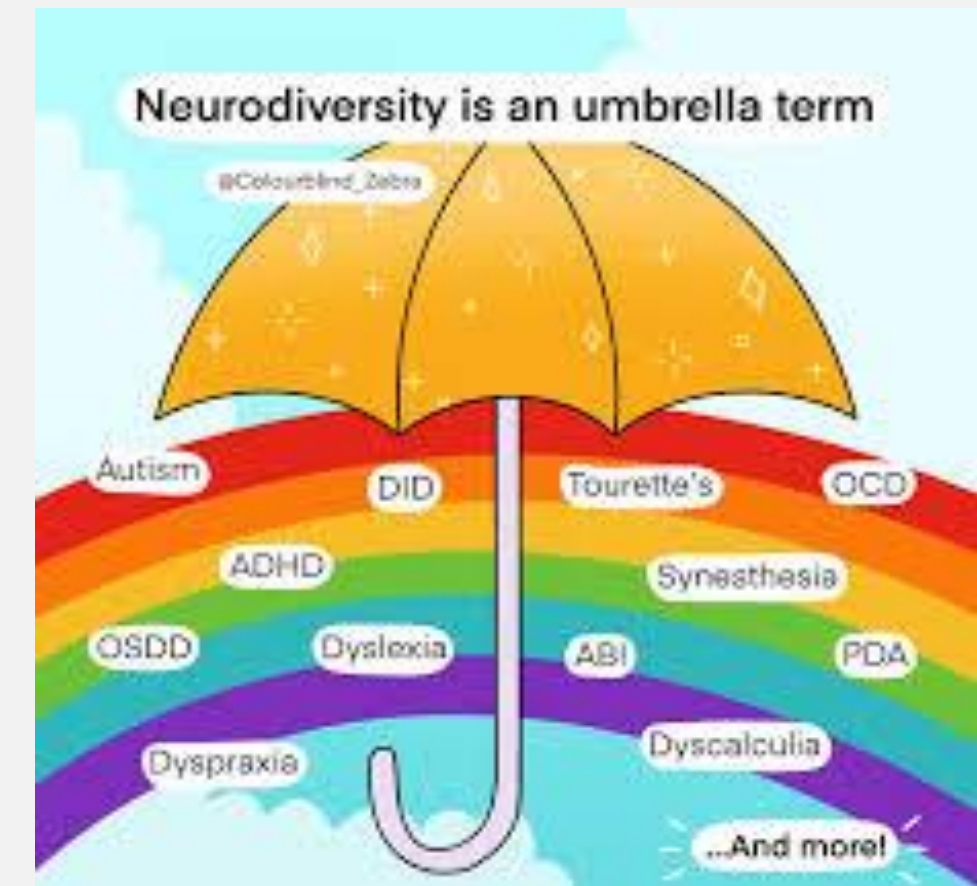
Despite how common it is, neurodiverse (also known as neurodivergent) talent continue to face barriers and discrimination at work. The result? High levels of unemployment, underemployment, pay disparity and undue discipline.



What is the spectrum?



What is neurodiversity?



What does neurodivergent mean?

Although this movement first began in the 1990s, for many people, the term “neurodiversity” may be new or unfamiliar. Neurodiversity is, by default, broad; there are so many ways that genes can be expressed that diverge from what is considered typical. However, the label usually refers to autism, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). However, some use “neurodiversity” more broadly to include other neurologically correlated clinical conditions, such as personality disorders and social anxiety disorders.

In other words, neurodivergent people see, feel and experience the world differently as a result of atypical brain function. This means they approach the world’s problems—and its solutions—from unconventional angles.

Sounds like a good thing, right?

" IF YOU'VE MET ONE PERSON
WITH AUTISM, YOU'VE MET
ONE PERSON WITH AUTISM."

DR. STEPHEN SHORE

(AUTISTIC PROFESSOR AT ADELPHI UNIVERSITY)

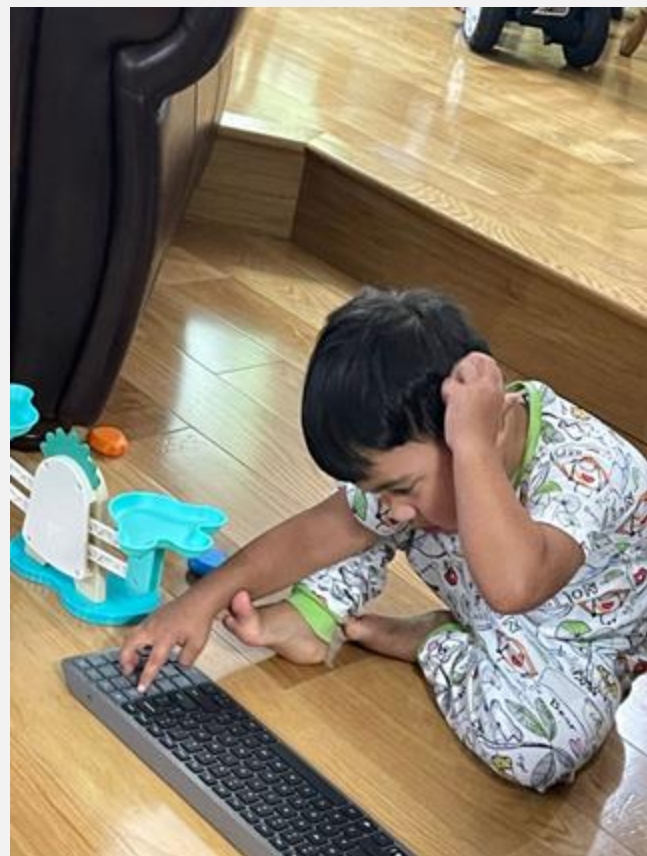
Who am I to say?



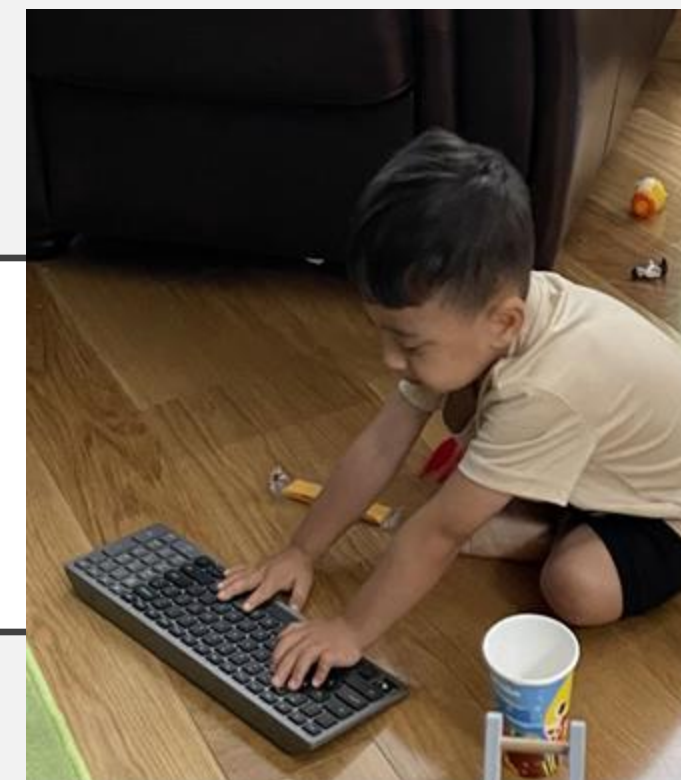
My neuro-spicy family!



Director of Development at Minnesota Autism Center
Chair, Healthy Communities
Board Member, Transforming Generations
Member, Minnesota Autism Council
Policy Lead, Early Education- Special Education Osseo School District
Member, Autism Spectrum Disorder Task Force
Member, Minnesota Health Care Coalition (NW Coalition, Central, South Central Coalition)
Member, Collective for Community Health
Staff, Children's Minnesota Community and Advocacy
Executive Director, Children's Health Association (CHA) benefitting Children's Minnesota



Why are we talking about this?



1. Because CHANCES ARE, you have colleagues that are on the spectrum. Approximately 20% of the population is neurodiverse, regardless of demographics.

Despite how common it is, neurodiverse (also known as neurodivergent) talent continue to face barriers and discrimination at work. The result? High levels of unemployment, underemployment, pay disparity and undue discipline.

2. An untapped pool of potential!

3. For those living on the autism spectrum, finding a job suited to their skillset can be an immense challenge. In fact, Drexel University's National Autism Indicators Report says 51% of workers on the spectrum have skills higher than what their job requires. Meanwhile, fewer than one in six adults with autism even have full-time employment. Consider the statistics: 15% of people of your employee pool are likely neurologically different. 90% of adults with autism are unemployed or underemployed.

Reframe!



- It's time to reframe how we view neurodiversity - and see it as an asset.
- By overlooking neurodivergent talent, organizations are missing out on a powerful opportunity to tap into unique perspectives, fuel innovation and approach problems and solutions in different ways.
- Organizations that make neurodiversity a focus of their DE&I (diversity, equity and inclusion) efforts have seen boosts in engagement, performance and profits. In particular, these companies have experienced increased innovation, improved communication, and widespread feelings of psychological safety, leading to more diverse, equitable and inclusive cultures.

Advantages of neurodiversity in the workplace

- A) neurodiverse people possess vital skills that businesses will need as they adopt more advanced technology.
- B) Improving company-wide communication and expectation-setting. Clarity that benefits everyone.
- C) Inclusivity benefits everyone.



Why am I focusing on recruitment, hiring and employee support?



Roughly 1% of the population is autistic.

Up to 2% of the population has ADHD.

As much as 20% of the population may be dyslexic.

It's hard to estimate the prevalence of neurodiversity due to factors like nondisclosure and biases in diagnosis. However, these estimates give organizations a good idea of how many neurodiverse people are in their workplaces currently, as well as how many neurodiverse people they *could* hire with an effective hiring program.

Hiring



Kickstarting a neurodiversity hiring program

Companies that have seen the most success recruiting and developing neurodivergent talent have grounded their hiring strategies in their own talent and business priorities, guided by inclusive and accountable leaders. Consider a two-pronged approach to inclusive program design:

- Behavioral inclusion (inclusive mindsets, skill sets and relationships)
- Structural inclusion (fair and transparent structures, processes, and practices) to foster an equitable workplace

Supporting



You won't always know if an employee is neurodiverse. Neurodiverse people, after all, have the right to choose whether they tell people or not, and many choose not to disclose to avoid the very real stigma that exists around neurodiversity in the workplace. That's why companies need to approach practices and structures through an inclusive design lens. Neurodiverse people shouldn't need to self-identify and ask for support in order for an organization to build systems that work for them. ***Rather, companies should build systems with those specific needs already in mind.*** A neurodiverse person, then, would not have to ask for support because the tools and resources they need would already be in place. ***And when you design for neurodiversity—and the structures and practices established to support neurodiverse talent—you build something that works for everyone.***

Employer Assistance and Resource's Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) has great resources, including a checklist for "organizational success in Neurodiveristy Inclusion"! Check out AskEARN.org

**ADA is the
floor, not
the ceiling.**

Accommodations

There are many accommodations organizations can make to the work environment that allows people to maintain or increase productivity, while alleviating common struggles. Consider these environment changes for people with sensory issues:

- Allowing an employee to wear sunglasses inside if they are overstimulated by the overhead lights or even changing the lighting in their office or part of the building
- Providing noise canceling headphones
- Offering decompression spaces
- Not requiring people to turn on their camera for remote meetings and understanding why some people aren't comfortable making eye contact with others

Beyond making accommodations, think carefully about how to best leverage the unique strengths that each person, neurodivergent or not, brings to the organization. If they are super-focused, where is that most useful? If they move quickly from one topic to another, is there a role where multitasking is needed or even preferred? Think about the roles currently in your organization. Establish what is mission critical and where there is room for flexibility.

Support (Benefitting ANY Employee)



Support SHOULD go beyond accommodations (which are the legal minimum). Support could include:

- Obtaining leadership support and offering education or training to all levels
- Share an explicit statement of support and intention
- Identify internal “champions” to support initiative or launch policy
- Engage employees who self-identify or who are family members of neurodivergent individuals to be mentors or safe contacts
- Offer training to all employees with a focus on supervisory staff
- Prepare and educate recruiters

Retaining

Neurodiversity
in the *workplace*

In addition to hiring, there should be a focus on retainment. To facilitate retention, consider:

Ensuring onboarding/orientation is inclusive of neurodivergent employees

Prepare supervisors and managers about “stay interviews” or the importance of regular check-ins

Identify internal resources that can provide support such as Employee Assistance Programs or mentors

Identify and share community resources to provide support if needed outside the workplace, such as job coaches and mental health support

Clearly identify your contacts (HR professionals, supervisors, etc) that can be contacted with any accommodation requests or needs

Fostering Inclusivity

- a) Get buy-in from all levels
- b) Engage with the local community
- c) Adjust your hiring practices
- d) Create a workplace policy on neurodiversity (but remember that having respect and open support baked into your office culture is fundamental to supporting policies)
- e) Organize expert-driven, two-way training (especially for soft skills) for neurodiverse employees
- f) Organize training for neurotypical employees (emphasizing the different types of neurodivergence, recognizing unconscious biases, and learning how to adapt communication and work styles to create an inclusive environment)
- g) Be ready and willing to accommodate! Consider if you can offer flexible work schedules, adjust employment settings, share communication preferences, etc. Consider an anonymous feedback tool.

Neurodiversity



is just another kind of diversity.

Examples of Neurodiversity Policy #1

Neurodiversity and Inclusion Policy

Here are our principles and approach:

Principles

- Everyone deserves opportunities, encouragement and support to realise their full potential
- A diversity of cognitive approaches is a source of great strength and value within a genuinely inclusive workplace
- All reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that policies, practices and culture do not discriminate against neurodivergent people
- Staff members must not be subject to unfavourable treatment if they choose to disclose a neurodivergent condition
- Each person is unique and there can be a high degree of overlap between neurodivergent conditions. Consequently, any support needs must be identified and implemented on the basis of personal evaluation and individual consultation – not assumptions or stereotypes.

Approach

[Organization] will endeavour to:

1. Treat each staff member, volunteer, consultant and service user fairly
2. Identify and implement appropriate workplace and programme adjustments
3. Tailor management and training support to better meet the needs of the staff member or volunteer
4. Help its staff members and volunteers to flourish
5. Spot issues early and resolve them before they become serious

[Organization] will:

- Endeavour to ensure clear communication with Neurodivergent individuals which is appropriate for the individual.
- Ensure a collaborative approach with Neurodivergent Individuals.
- Endeavour to be flexible, whilst being mindful of the needs of [organization] and our charitable aims.
- Adopt a person-led approach, together with an open dialogue which is inclusive and non-judgemental.
- Create a culture where employees and volunteers feel safe to discuss their needs and to advocate for themselves.
- Design services and programmes with accessibility considerations in mind.
- Raise awareness of neurodiversity.

Where reasonable adjustments are necessary and can be accommodated, [organization] will support these. Reasonable adjustments will be made on a case by case basis and will be agreed with line managers in relation to the employee's job role. Adjustments may include changes in communications, ways of working, tools, coaching or external support, or other practical considerations.

Policy Example #2

Neurodiversity Policy

Last reviewed _____

Introduction

We are committed to promoting an inclusive environment for neurodiversity in our organisation. As part of this, we will provide appropriate workplace support to any of our employees who are neurodivergent. Neurodiversity refers to the different ways that the brain works and interprets information. Those who are neurodivergent will process information in a different way to those who are neurotypical. Although we recognize that neurodivergence can cause difficulties for affected individuals, we will focus on the strengths that are brought to the workplace.

Employer Responsibilities

We are aware of our obligations under the ADA in relation to making reasonable adjustments for employees who have a disability. For more information on our general approach towards disability at work, please refer to our equal opportunities policy.

You will not be treated unfairly or suffer any other form of detriment at work due to your neurodivergence. You will be given the same opportunities as other staff and will not be refused employment, overlooked for promotion and training opportunities, or denied any other workplace benefits due to your neurodivergence.

Employee Support

We recognize that many neurological conditions are “spectrum” conditions, meaning that they can affect individuals in varying ways. We will ensure that any measures implemented will be suited to each individual by undertaking a process of consultation with them. We will not adopt a “one-size-fits-all” approach, nor will we stereotype individuals based on common characteristics associated with their neurodivergence.

Workplace Adjustments

The organization is legally obliged to make reasonable adjustments to an employee’s role or working conditions if they have a disability that places them at a disadvantage when performing their role and we will ensure compliance with our obligations in this regard.

In order to assist you in your daily duties, we will explore making adjustments to your role or working environment with the aim of reducing the effect that your neurodivergence is having on you. We acknowledge that neurodivergence affects each individual in different ways so no adjustment will be made without fully discussing it with you first.

As an illustrative guide, we have set out the below examples of adjustments that may be made to reduce or remove disadvantages faced by neurodivergent employees in the workplace.

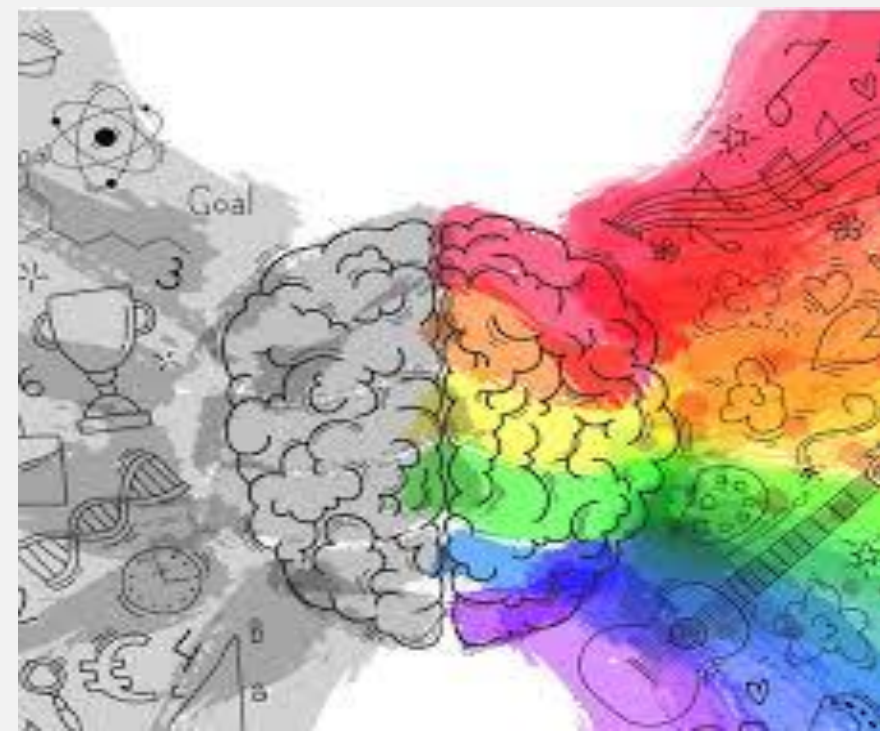
- Amending working duties.
- Offering flexible working arrangements such as homeworking or permitting employees to start earlier or finish later.
- Redesigning the workplace/workstation.
- Providing visible instructions next to office equipment and machinery such as photocopiers.
- Allowing employees to use equipment such as noise-cancelling headphones.
- Providing employees with lockers and name labels to help them organise their work and equipment.
- Providing a mentor/buddy to employees when learning new tasks.
- Allocating work areas with more natural light.

This is not an exhaustive list and all applicable adjustments will be discussed and explored with neurodivergent employees on an individual basis to ensure the adjustments put in place are appropriate to their individual circumstances. The effectiveness of any adjustments will be reviewed on a regular basis and may be subject to change if it becomes apparent that these are no longer fit for purpose. This review will be carried out proactively between the employee and their line manager in line with our duty to make reasonable adjustments.

Creating An Inclusive Environment

We are committed to ensuring neurodivergent employees in our organization feel comfortable in discussing neurodivergence, should they wish to, and the impact it has on them. We will raise awareness by:

- providing training to managers on supporting neurodivergence
- arranging activities and education campaigns on neurodivergence for all staff
- creating a support network for neurodivergent employees to ensure a safe place to go to discuss issues they may be having and to share coping strategies
- encouraging neurodivergent senior employees to talk about the impact it has on them
- creating neurodiversity champions.



Sustainability

Creating a policy and then never talking about it again won't get us very far.

Consider how to sustain an initiative:

- Design metrics to provide regular evaluation and identify areas for needed change
- Engage other internal company partners (e.g., EAP, HR, communications team, training department, etc.) for support as needed to further internal communication campaigns, train staff, provide support to supervisors and neurodivergent employees, etc.
- Regularly seek collaboration with and regular input, feedback and perspectives from neurodivergent employees or resources that include diverse voices as full partners in the success of these initiatives
- Assess the culture
- Build longer-term talent and leadership pipelines that are inclusive of diverse candidates
- Collaborate with local apprenticeship programs or partners to create apprenticeships that further employment opportunities targeted for neurodivergent candidates (do you utilize interns?)

Summary

Neurodiversity in the workplace can be just as important as other forms of diversity. It can help improve the culture, creativity, and supportiveness of a job for all employees.

Your efforts can go a long way for creating a workplace that thrives with neurodiversity through:

- open communication
- self-education and awareness
- empathy





THE PUZZLE PIECE

The puzzle piece was originally utilized because autism was a “puzzling condition”.

The infinity symbol represents the idea that autism is a vast and complex spectrum that includes individuals with a wide range of strengths and challenges. It acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to understanding or supporting people with autism.

Resources

- EARN's *Neurodiversity in the Workplace* webpage
- EARN's *Toolkit for Establishing and Maintaining Successful Employee Resource Groups*
- Disability:IN and ACCESS-IT group's *Autism@Work Playbook*
- Harvard Business Review *Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage*
- Job Accommodation Network
- Autism Speaks' [Autism Response Team](#) can help you with information, resources and opportunities.

In English: 888-288-4762 | help@autismspeaks.org

RESOURCES
THAT ARE
AVAILABLE

Locally:



- <https://sparkforautism.org>



<https://mn.gov/autism/>



<https://ausm.org>

THANK YOU!

www.linkedin.com/in/sarah-sirianni-driever

Email: sarah.driever@childrensmn.org

