



# Access To Nature

Awareness & understanding of Neurodivergence and how it intersects with nature

Andrew Lansley



# Key aims of today

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- To develop an understanding of neurodivergent types and traits
- To understand the specific challenges neurodivergent people might face accessing nature
- To be able to approach project planning and development processes to consider neurodivergent people with confidence



# Who am I?

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- I am autistic, have lived in Gloucestershire most of my life and worked almost 30 years in culture, charity, academia and politics.
- I am a freelancer and currently work for Cheltenham Festivals as Innovation Manager, Senior Academic at the University of Gloucestershire, Facilitator for the Cheltenham Culture Board as well as a professional musician.
- I work with national organisations (Arts Council, Creative United, Attitude is Everything and more) to progress equitable and sustainability policy and practice.

# Session 1

## **Question:**

What do we mean when we say “Neurodivergent”?

# Session 1: Neurodiversity definitions

Neurodiversity **suggests that there is not a 'normal' or 'right' way for the brain to develop**, in much the same way that there is no 'normal' or 'right' gender, race or culture. Neurodiversity rejects the idea that Autism and other neurological differences should be cured.

NHS England

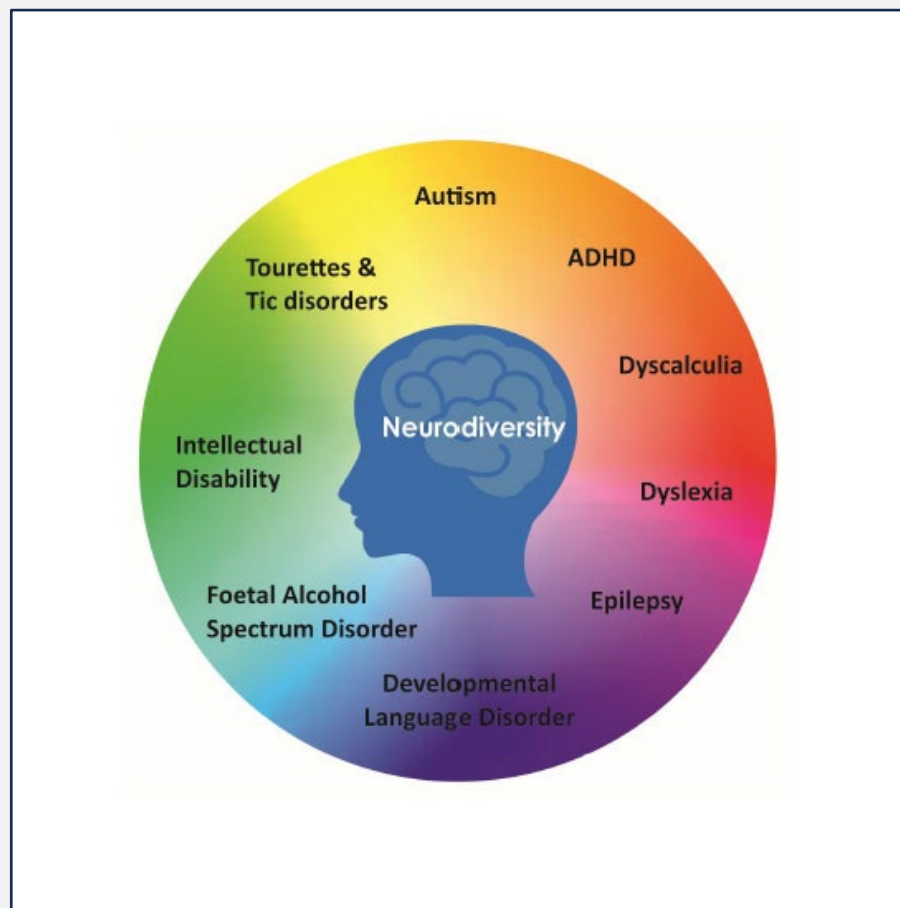
**“the idea that people with brains that work differently are part of the normal range in humans** This term is often used as an alternative way of considering the autism spectrum.”

Oxford Dictionary

Neurodiversity is **the idea that the way we think is not always the same**. Instead, this term recognises that all variations of human neurology should be respected as just another way of being, and that neurological differences like autism, ADHD and Dyslexia are the result of natural variations in our genes.

Autism Educational Trust

# Session 1: Neurodivergence & the law



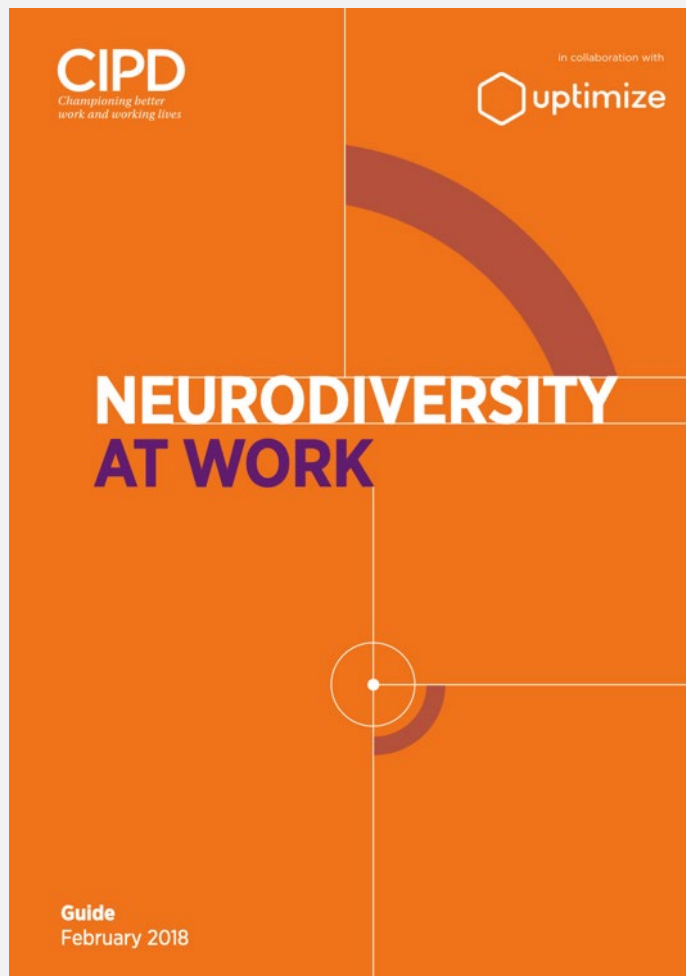
## Definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010 :

You're disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.

## What 'substantial' and 'long-term' mean

- 'substantial' is more than minor or trivial, e.g. it takes much longer than it usually would to complete a daily task like getting dressed
- 'long-term' means 12 months or more, e.g. a breathing condition that develops as a result of a lung infection

# Session 1: Staffing Guides



This guide is for anyone who want to learn more about neurodiversity, the benefits for their organisation, and how they can support neurodivergent people to be comfortable and successful at work.

The guide has two main aims:

- **to raise awareness of neurodiversity in the workplace among employers**
- **to inspire more employers to action**

It has been designed to help organisations take steps to encourage neurodiverse job applicants, remove potential 'friction points' in the hiring process and to support their staff to achieve their potential.

# Session 1: Being autism friendly



**A quick, easy guide to holding an autism-friendly event**

- Provide useful information and guidance ahead of the event
- Provide an accessibility map
- Consider appointing a named volunteer as a key 'autistic visitor' contact
- Get some input.
- Brief volunteers
- Establish at least one quiet zone/area/space
- Consider the sensory experience of your event
- Consider the catering sensory experience
- Set up a children's area
- Choose your venue and work with the staff there
- Promote this understanding

# Session 1: Discussion Points



**Does your organisation have a policy/position statement on neurodiversity? Are you aware of its content?**

**Does your organisation have connections to any local/specialist networks?**

**How does your organisation communicate with neurodiverse members/community/audience?**

# Session 1: Questions?

A hand holding a daisy flower in a field with mountains in the background.

# Workshop 1: Neurodivergence & Nature

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This workshop will explore neurodivergent experiences with nature from public/staff/volunteer perspectives, contextualising the foundation introduced in the first session and providing a toolkit for participants to undertake Workshop 2

It will cover:

- Theoretical frameworks
- Audience & Participants / Website policy & position statements
- Event planning

# Workshop 1: Theoretical Frameworks Supporting Nature Connection Benefits

**Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory (ART)** states that directed attention, the ability to focus on cognitively-demanding tasks, critical to high-level cognitive functioning and behavioural regulation, fatigues with use but can be restored through exposure to nature.

**Attention Restoration Theory** proposes that exposure to nature can restore abilities around attention and focus and enhance cognitive functioning and behavioural performance.

**Ulrich's Stress Recovery Theory (SRT)** proposes that when people are psychologically or physically stressed, then exposure to unthreatening natural environments will reduce stress and have a restorative effect.

# Workshop 1: Theoretical Frameworks Supporting Nature Connection Benefits

*“Findings suggest that everyday play settings make a difference in overall symptom severity in children with ADHD. Specifically, children with ADHD who play regularly in green play settings have milder symptoms than children who play in built outdoor and indoor settings. This is true for all income groups and for both boys and girls. Interestingly, for hyperactive children, the apparent advantage of green spaces is true only for relatively open green settings”*

<https://iaap-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1758-0854.2011.01052.x>

# Workshop 1: Natural England Findings

1. Outdoor learning in the natural environment for children with autism deserves further consideration and investigation by practitioners, policy makers and researchers. It is important that any future developments embrace the full range of autistic learners, and encompass outdoor activities connected with schools, families and communities.
2. The evidence base on autistic children and the natural environment needs strengthening. Autistic children and young people have been notable by their absence in much of the discussion within these different research fields. There is a clear need for more and better research into autistic children and their outdoor learning in the natural environment.
3. Future research needs to address the fact that little is known about the outdoor activities and circumstances that are most appropriate for different kinds of autistic learners.

<https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/11085017>

*28 March 2021*

# AUTISM AND NATURE- CONNECTION



# Workshop 1: Neurodivergence & Nature

Many people with autism experience either hypersensitivity (over-sensitivity) or hyposensitivity (under-sensitivity) to sensory experiences such as **hearing, tasting, smelling, touching and feeling and sights**.

Taking people with autism who are over-sensitive outside and **inviting them to connect with nature through sight, sound and touch** can enhance their ability to cope with a wider range of stimuli and reduce their experiences of sensory problems. For those who are under-sensitive, **walks in nature with a focus on the sights, sounds and smells or nature** can increase their sensory stimulation in these areas.

<http://irj.uswr.ac.ir/article-1-884-en.html>

# Workshop 1: Discussion Points




**Are you aware of/have you participated in any activities that have been adapted for a neurodiverse audience?**

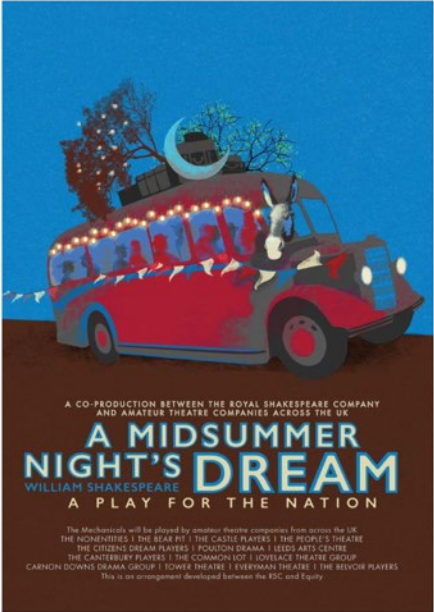
**Can you think of any events or activities your organization undertakes that could be adapted for a neurodiverse audience?**

**Are there any additional groups or communities who might benefit/be interested in adapted formats?**

# Workshop 1: Relaxed Performances



**Visual Story for the Relaxed Performance**  
Thursday 14 July 1:15pm



A CO-PRODUCTION BETWEEN THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY AND AMATEUR THEATRE COMPANIES ACROSS THE UK.  
**A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM**  
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE  
A PLAY FOR THE NATION

The Merchant's will be played by amateur theatre companies from across the UK:  
THE NONENTRIES | THE BEAR PIT | THE CASTLE PLAYERS | THE PEOPLE'S THEATRE  
THE CITIZENS DREAM PLAYERS | POSITION DREAMS | SEEDS ARTS CENTRE  
THE CANTERBURY PLAYERS | THE COMMON LOT | LOVEFACE THEATRE GROUP  
CANNON DOWNS DRAMA GROUP | TOWER THEATRE | EVERYMAN THEATRE | THE BEYFOR PLAYERS  
This is an arrangement developed between the RSC and Equity

A **relaxed performance** is where the ambience of the auditorium and theatre 'rules' are relaxed.

These performances are ideal for people with learning disabilities or autism, or anyone who would benefit from a more relaxed environment.

**Royal Shakespeare Company:**

<https://www.rsc.org.uk/your-visit/access/assisted-performances/relaxed-performances>

What does a “relaxed performance” look like for nature?

# Workshop 1: Autism/Neurodiverse Friendly



## Leeds Waterfront Festival 2022 - Autism & Neurodiverse friendly event

Leeds Autism Services partnered with the [Canal and River Trust](#) to host an accessible version of the Leeds Waterfront Festival. The event was specially designed to be autism, neurodiverse and learning disability friendly:

<https://www.leedsautism.org.uk/event/leeds-waterfront-festival-2022-autism-neurodiverse-friendly-event>

# Workshop 1: Task

**Task: Create a draft 30 second script for a walkthrough for your organization (any format)**

The topic could be about a venue, center, conference or any kind of event held by your organization.

Think beyond time and place: What are the key considerations you would need to communicate from an ND perspective?

# Workshop 1: Questions?

# Workshop 2: Neurodivergence In Practice

Building on themes introduced in Workshop 1 participants will be invited to rework an existing project/process/idea to incorporate neurodivergent perspectives as part of a guided session

Examples and case study introduction:

- What's your staffing/volunteering policies?
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- How do you engage neurodiverse audiences & participants? (e.g. Are policies/position statements accessible on your website? Are you connected with local communities and networks etc?)
  - Event planning (What can we consider?)



# Workshop 2: Case Study 1



## Neurodivergents' Nature Walk and Live Music in the Park

14:00 – 16:30

Bex Harper Earth Coaching ([map](#))

[Google Calendar](#) · [ICS](#)

This group brings together like-minded, positive and understanding neurodivergents who love to get out in nature or use nature to manage their neurodiversity. Most social events are local and outdoors, but there are also some online workshops to help members. We are a positive and fun group based in Southend-on-Sea and you will find us hanging out on the beach, in woodlands for walks or (in the colder months) meeting in cafes near the sea front for talks on neurodiversity, nature and wellbeing!

[View Event →](#)

# Workshop 2: Case Study 2



**Thorndon Forest Fun for Neurodiverse Children**

# Workshop 2: Case Study 3



# Workshop 2: Discussion Points

**From these case studies what can we learn about:**



- **Website/comms strategy**
- **Preparing environments**
- **Networking and community engagement**

# Cheltenham Literature Festival 2022: Case Study

Student Union



Meet the Student Union 2022/23 Representatives



Hi Andrew, Louise and James.

Thank you again for today. It was lovely to meet you and start my volunteering journey.

I have been talking on the way home, and I would really like to come and see Motsi Mabuse on Sunday morning (10:30-11:30) (LE49).

I was just wondering if you needed any help for this event?

Kay.

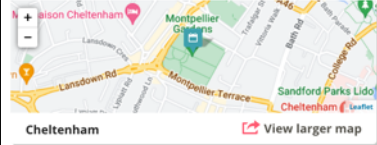
Events / Cheltenham

## Ross Collins: There's a Mouse in My House (LF76)

Details Images

Sunday, 16 October 2022 - 3:30pm to 4:30pm

Address  
Montpellier Gardens  
Montpellier Spa Road  
Cheltenham  
Gloucestershire  
GL50 1UL



Cheltenham [View larger map](#)

### Accessibility features


- Access for Wheelchair Users
- Accessible toilet
- Autism Friendly
- Baby Changing Facilities
- Changing Place Facility
- Family Friendly
- Hidden Disabilities Awareness

Cheltenham Literature Festival 2022 (LF76)

### Ross Collins: There's a Mouse in My House

Bear and Mouse are the best of enemies. But will they ever get along? Illustrator and author Ross Collins' books (There's a Bear on My Chair / There's a Mouse in My House) are guaranteed to have you howling with laughter. Join Ross for live drawing, interactive read-alongs and plenty of mischievous mayhem.

THE SUNDAY TIMES | TIMESRADIO  
**CHELTEMPHAM**  
**Literature Festival**




## Relaxed Performance

This is a family relaxed performance.

What does that mean?

- There is a relaxed attitude to audience noise.
- The lights in the venue will remain low throughout the show.
- There will be no sudden loud noises in the performance.
- You are free to leave and re-enter the venue at any point.
- Our venue staff have been briefed on how they can support you at the event
- You can ask staff questions at any time during the performance.



## Volunteering/Partnerships

*With Volunteering/Louise & Partnerships/Jenna*

## Community & Communications

*With Helena & James/Ops*

# Cheltenham Literature Festival 2022: Case Study

Hi Andrew,

I'm hoping you can help with below enquiry we have had from a customer about an accessibility video as I know you making one on Friday.

Any help you can offer will be very much appreciated.

Best wishes,

Phil

**Phil Brook**

*Box Office Supervisor*

T: 01242 569272

[cheltenhamfestivals.com](http://cheltenhamfestivals.com)

## Vulnerable adult escalation/reporting protocol

In the event of finding a vulnerable adult who may be in need of assistance the following steps should be taken:

- Those concerned about the welfare and safety of a vulnerable adult should assess, without intervention, whether there are other family members/carers available to look after them
- The designated event supervisor (usually the venue manager) should be made aware of the situation along with any security staff on duty. They...

**For audience**

## Queer Up: Love, Life and Mental Health

### LF34 Accessibility Script

(For artist/chair)

#### WHAT DOES THIS DOCUMENT CONTAIN?

This document has been created to help share the process of arriving on site and preparing for your event at Cheltenham Literature Festival 2022.

Below you will find the **Main Event Information** as well as contact details for staff and other performers, followed by your anticipated schedule for the event day. We have also included pictures of the venue and event space at the bottom of this document.

If you have any questions about the information below, please contact either [Rosy](#) or [Andrew](#) to discuss further – we are always happy to support you in any way we can.

#### MAIN EVENT INFORMATION

**Location:** Town Hall Pillar Room, Imperial Square, Cheltenham GL50 1QA

**Link to Google Map Pin:** [Location of Cheltenham Town Hall](#)

**Soundcheck Time:** Sunday 9 October 2022 12:00pm - 12:45pm

**Event Time:** Sunday 9 October 2022 1:00pm - 2:00pm

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

[Andrew.lansley@cheltenhamfestivals.com](mailto:Andrew.lansley@cheltenhamfestivals.com) Andrew Lansley (Innovation Manager)

[Rosy.turner@cheltenhamfestivals.com](mailto:Rosy.turner@cheltenhamfestivals.com) Rosy Turner (Operations Intern)

[hannah.eadie.moore@gmail.com](mailto:hannah.eadie.moore@gmail.com) 07588201084 Hannah Moore (Event Manager – on the day contact)

Alexis Caught, Charlie Craggs, and Sarah Kendrick (the panelists) are all represented by Rebecca Oram at Walker Books ([rebecca.oram@walker.co.uk](mailto:rebecca.oram@walker.co.uk)). Please feel free to contact her in advance if you have any specific questions for the other participants.



Cheltenham Town Hall (rear)



Pillar Room Stage (with theatre style seating set-up)

#### MAPS/FLOORPLANS



**For artists**

# Literature Festival 2022: Leo's Story

**Sent:** Saturday, October 8, 2022 9:22 AM  
**To:** Box Office <[boxoffice@cheltenhamfestivals.com](mailto:boxoffice@cheltenhamfestivals.com)>  
**Subject:** Accessibility for school trips

Hi,

My autistic son will be attending the Literature Festival next week with his (mainstream) school. **Part of making the event accessible and beneficial for him is showing him in advance as much as possible of the venue and events.**

Is there a video walk through of the area and venues that I could show him? Things that I'd ideally like him to be able to see beforehand are:

A story telling session

The main entrance area; any key decorations or features they might be able to recognise above the crowds

The entrance to the toilets

The inside of the venue's & likely seating arrangements

The areas they might eat lunch in, including what the Wild Wood area looks like when there are entertainers around.

**It doesn't have to be overly detailed - it could even be a silent video with captions, but it would make a huge difference to autistic visitors, and would be so gratefully received by myself and many other parents of children who need more reassurance and preparation to access such wonderful events.**

One Google Drive link later...



Dear Andrew,

Firstly, another huge thank you for the effort and empathy in responding to my emails so quickly. **Leo being able to watch the videos and remember previous trips and see new areas massively reduced his anxiety, and it was invaluable for us as parents to also see the inside of the venues, as we could then use our own knowledge to facilitate conversations with him about his experience.** For example, we were able to ask him if the show he was talking about was in the venue with the folding chairs, or with the normal chairs. **It seems minor, but it really helps us** understand the whole picture for Leo, and saves him having to try to tell us more information to describe his situation.

Without parents to advocate and interpret information for neurodiverse children, school trips can feel overwhelming for all family members. **Having this information ahead of time enables us to prepare our children in the safety of their own home and at their own pace, plus it gives us time to research and find extra details that might be needed.** For my family, it helps Leo when we can talk authoritatively about the experience, and have confidence in what he can expect.

He was delighted that another autistic person was able to send him the videos. After I had explained this to him, he excitedly told his dad that he'd seen videos from another autistic person "who understands why we need information". Representation matters; I am very grateful for your disclosure, and **I want you to know that it made a very real and wonderful impact on my seven year old who sometimes struggles with feeling so different from his peers.**

# Workshop 2: A reminder!

**Does your organisation have a policy/position statement on neurodiversity?** If you do, could you improve your policy/position statement? If you don't, could you write one?

**Do you have connections to a local network?** Where is your audience/key stakeholders? How could you connect with them in a meaningful way?

## Workshop 2: Task

**Task:** Develop your concept from the first session (or pick a new one!) and create a short summary, outlining specific details to be provided to a neurodivergent audience.

This could be a short event plan, including overview with bullet points about key considerations to be communicated in advance. You can also include information about any relevant adjustments to the environment suited to the relaxed/autism friendly format



# Share back & Summary

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Workshop participants are invited to share back their work with the group, reviewing key discussion points and reflecting upon the topics covered today.

# Recap and Feedback

## **Our key aims at the start of today were:**

- To develop an understanding of neurodivergent types and traits
- To understand the specific challenges neurodivergent people might face accessing nature
- To be able to approach project planning and development processes to consider neurodivergent people

Thank you

