

**EXPLORING  
STRENGTHS  
AND  
CHALLENGES  
OF NEURO  
DIFFERENCE  
AND THE  
BENEFITS OF  
CREATIVE  
INCLUSIVE  
DESIGN**



1. Introduction to Triple A Performer
2. What is neurodivergence?
3. Differences in neurodivergence
4. Undiagnosed presentation
5. Our stories
6. What does inclusivity look like in practice?
7. Q&A

## **Session Content**

Triple A Performer - born from the personal story of Joseph, diagnosed with Autism, ADHD and Anxiety (triple A).

Involved in performing arts for 14 years, at 19, he has just finished his first year at Trinity Laban and is living his dream!!

His story has been full of trauma and discrimination due to lack of understanding of his varied way of learning, attending, communicating, and interacting.

Joseph wants to change the narrative and Triple A Performer is the vehicle to drive this forward.

## **An Introduction to Triple A Performer**



The purpose of the charity is to raise awareness and acceptance of neurodivergence in the performing arts industry and create a level playing field free from discrimination and exclusion.

**Purpose**

Neurodivergence is a range of neurological conditions that vary the way in which someone learns, attends, communicates, and interacts. For example, Autism, ADHD, Dyspraxia, Dyslexia. These can be diagnosed or can be how a person identifies. Both are equally valid. Some people use the term neurodiversity in the same way. This term covers everyone as it includes people with anxiety and depression that may not identify and neurodivergent.

## **What is Neurodivergence?**

There are differences for everyone that identifies as neurodivergent. It is therefore very difficult to cover all of these. However, Dyslexia is often very misunderstood and has a lot of simple strategies that can make a big difference. We have created infographs that will help you to see at a glance what might help in a particular area.

## **Differences in Neurodivergence**



# Dyslexia



- A** Most people think that being dyslexic means you can't read; people can be affected in different ways with severity ranging from 1% to 99%.
- A** Reading can be difficult and takes longer. Larger text or text on coloured paper helps the letters stop moving around on the page. The preferred paper colour can be different for everyone, so please ask for preference.
- A** Remembering lyrics or dance choreography can be challenging. Audio and visual learning can help as the words or dance moves can be associated with the music and memorised more easily through beat and sound.
- A** Using coloured paper and tools such as a reader pen are helpful when learning scripts and taking in written information. If written information is given in advance, this is helpful.
- A** Being given the opportunity to discuss access needs is essential to ensure fair access.

You might have students or colleagues who don't openly identify as neurodivergent; this might be because they don't feel comfortable in disclosing or they may not recognise it in themselves. If you think that they will benefit from the tips in the infographs and films, then use them. Support doesn't need to be formal.

## Undiagnosed Neurodivergence



## Performing Arts/Acting Training

### Communication



- A Say what you mean and mean what you say in straightforward language.
- A Sarcasm and jokes can be difficult to interpret especially if we are not familiar with each other.
- A Facial expressions and body language can be confusing so don't rely on these to get your message across.
- A Tone of voice and strong accents can also be difficult to work out so be aware of this.
- A Write down instructions and display them if they are important, such as Training Rules, Session Plan.

# JOSEPH'S STORY

- I want to share with you my personal story to illustrate how performing arts can positively impact on neurodivergent children and young people when everyone works together and shares the same focus.
- Diagnosed with autism / ADHD at 4 years old
- Attended 4 schools, including independent, specialist and mainstream
- 3 fixed term exclusions, 1 year out of school, 3 tribunals to fight for an education. WE WON!
- Under mental health services for anxiety and medicated to keep safe and well since the age of 8
- Unable to audition for anything professional in my younger years as there just wasn't the support to do so
- Openly discriminated against during auditions and experienced further discrimination in rehearsals when successful.
- Conversations with potential agents centering around NOT disclosing neurodivergence 'as we don't want to put people off'. We didn't go with these agents!

# JOSEPH'S STORY

Achieved

9 GCSES

3 'A' LEVELS – Drama, History and Physics

Diploma In Musicianship with Distinction

1<sup>st</sup> Year Student at Trinity Laban Conservatoire studying BA Honours in Musical Theatre Performance



I don't remember much about my younger years at school; maybe it was that awful that I blocked it out! I do remember starting at Chesterfield Studios and Jonathan would take me to a studio to play drums very loudly. It got rid of all my negative energy and let me focus. We did this a lot!!



Being on stage and singing is great for my confidence and helps me to escape my anxiety. I am in character when singing and performing and that character very often isn't anxious.



My brain is very active so it helps me to do lots of things that interest me but also burn off energy. This helps me to focus; therefore sitting around and waiting is very difficult for me.



I struggle with small talk in any situation but especially with people I don't know and when I am in an audition or something equally pressured.



If I don't understand what is expected of me, I tend to mask. For me, this looks like I am disinterested as I go quiet and remove myself from the activity by standing at the back of the room.

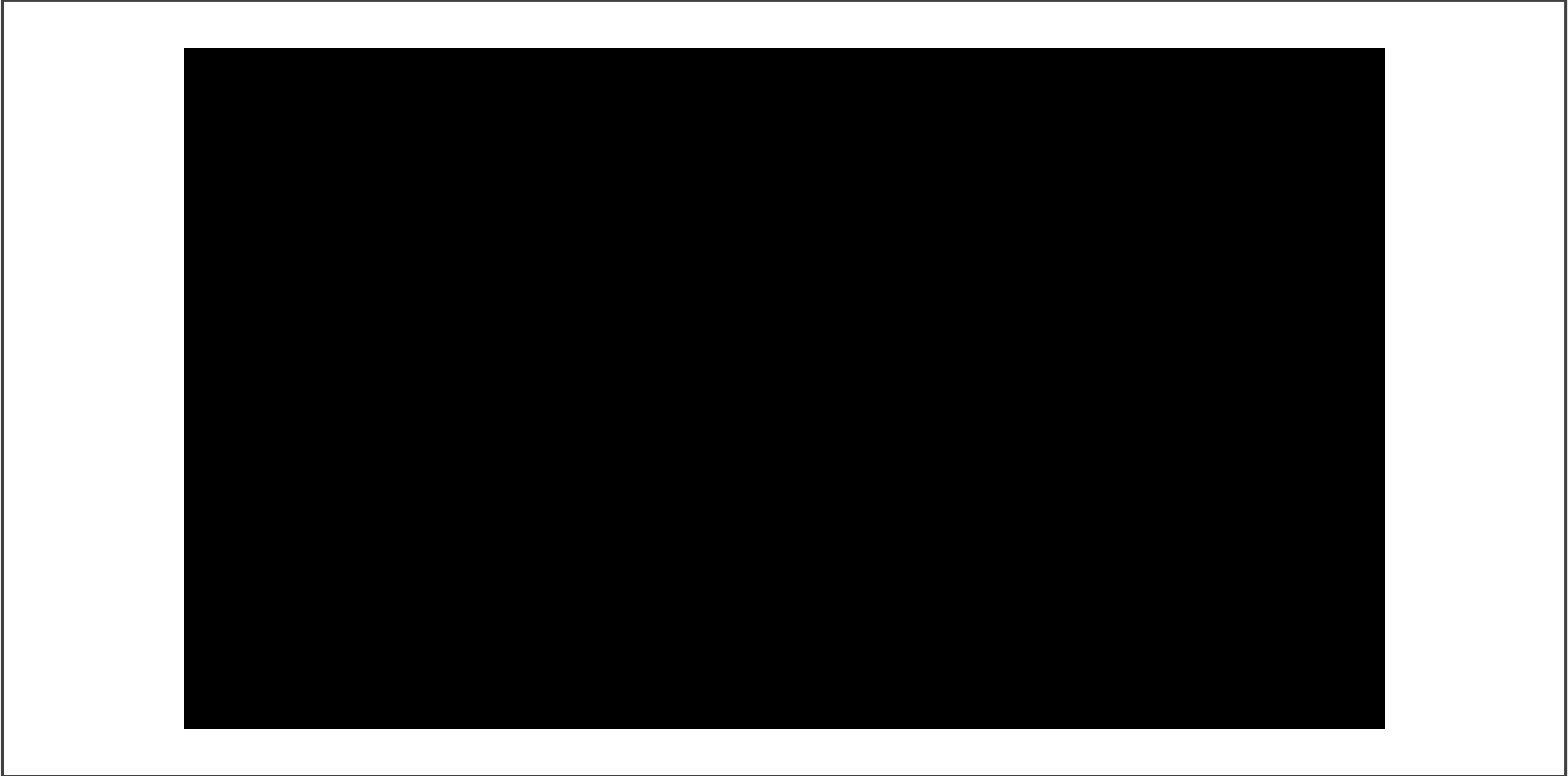


# Masking



- Ⓐ Masking is a term that describes how neurodivergent people attempt to fit within the social circumstances and environment around them.
- Ⓐ It is a strategy which helps to remove neurodivergent differences for a period of time, allowing them to fit in and exist on a level footing with peers.
- Ⓐ Masking can make someone appear bored or uninterested or joking around to distract themselves from a situation.
- Ⓐ Masking takes a huge amount of effort and is emotionally exhausting. Recovery time in a breakout space is essential to self-regulate.
- Ⓐ Understanding how to support us is vital and allows us to be more like ourselves.

# **MEGAN'S STORY**







Support with pre planning and organisation so that work doesn't build up and get out of control



Break tasks down into manageable chunks and clarify learning



Find the best way to note take – written, pre printed, audio, visual ...



Offer regular breaks and time out in a quieter space



Be clear on what is expected and how this can be achieved



Be nice and be approachable but with clear boundaries

WHAT DOES  
INCLUSIVITY LOOK  
LIKE IN PRACTICE?

The general feel amongst neurodivergent groups is that we would rather you ask questions and learn than dismiss them in fear of getting something wrong. Everyone loves a trier and this is no different.

The majority of neurodivergent people prefer difference first terminology, i.e. autistic person, neurodivergent person. The reason for this is that the difference is not an accessory but them as a person.

WHAT IF I SAY  
SOMETHING WRONG?  
I DON'T WANT TO  
OFFEND

HOWEVER,  
GUARANTEED WAYS  
TO OFFEND ARE BY  
SAYING....

- 'Well, everyone is a little bit autistic, aren't they?!' No, they are absolutely not. That is like saying that everyone is a little bit pregnant because they have a component that can make this happen!
- 'You don't look disabled / autistic ...' Neurodivergence doesn't have a look; it is an invisible difference. Neurodivergence is complex and individual, making it very difficult to describe. Please don't ask for justification but ask how you can support.
- 'I didn't want to treat you differently.' Acknowledging and accepting difference is real inclusive practice. Underplaying difference and essentially ignoring it makes us feel undervalued.



Q&A

Thank you for your time. We hope that you found this session useful.

If you ever need any help, our advice is free, just get in touch!

Thank you