

JOHS Provider Conference

June 6, 2025

Notes from Session: Supporting the Supporters: Organizational Practices That Honor Neurodivergence and Lived Experience

Presenters:

- Krysten Hall (she/her) - WeShine
- Babatunde Azubuike (they/them) - Black & Beyond the Binary Initiative
- Madeline Adams (she/they) - Equi Institute
- Geoff Moser (he/him) - MHAAO
- Dawn Duran-Conrad (she/her) - NARA Northwest

Moderators: Jaidra Hennessey

Notetaker: Andre Jaurigui & Kadi White

-Main Points from Session Overview/Presentation (high level; detail not required):

- This presentation is meant to be a conversation about what's happening at organizations, discuss ideas, and collaborate on strategies to best support neurodivergent staff and staff with lived experience -
- Neurodiversity is like a light going into a prism and the resulting colors are the varying types of neurodivergence
- With the current administration, there is an increase in the spread of misinformation regarding autism and neurodivergence
- Challenges faced by staff
 - One-size-fits-all performance reviews fail to represent different communication, processing, and work styles
 - Work norms often reward neurotypical work styles (e.g., speaking up during meetings)
 - Misinterpretation of body language and avoidance of eye contact
 - Sensory needs overlooked (e.g., sensory overload with loud team lunches)
- Challenges faced by supervisors
 - Because norms often reward neurotypical behaviors and work styles, it could negatively impact how supervisors perceive someone who is neurodivergent

- Purpose of today is to uplift and shed light on how neurodivergence is valuable in the workplace
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-Questions/Answers (summarization):

- *How has your team grown stronger by centering neurodivergent voices?*
 - Created an environment where staff feel at home and comfortable to share their opinions and concerns
 - Remain flexible and curious to their opinions and working styles has been important (e.g., deadlines, clocking in and out), ask how they want to be communicated with and how they'd like to receive feedback; giving them a voice to share their thoughts
 - Built rapport and trust with staff; Helped support staff and prevent burnout
 - Kept eyes, ears, mind open to be aware of things that may have been overlooked otherwise; burnout comes quicker to neurodivergent staff and staff with lived experience
 - Put people first (humanity and needs) and centering that during every meeting, interaction, and connection
 - Allowing staff to share what they need and see leadership model what it looks like to ask for what they need
 - When clients see that staff are putting people first they trust quicker
 - Staff are cared for as people first; can't pour out of an empty vessel
 - Work schedule and benefits: Work weeks are only 32 hours (4-day work weeks); folx only need to work in the office 2 out of 4 days; office closures (office is closed for a week throughout the year); Every 3 years each employee gets 8 weeks paid time off
 - Healing people around ableism, capitalism, colonization, moralizing productivity (i.e., I need to produce in order to have worth); making time to move slowly and move deliberately
 - Move at the speed of trust
- *How do you center your neurodivergent voice?*
 - Make inclusive language a habit
 - At every meeting introduce selves, share pronouns, and share access/accommodation needs (e.g., my accommodation needs are met, I need to keep my camera off, etc)
 - Positive peer pressure
 - When there is trust built, if staff notice a colleague may not be feeling well, encourage them to take time off to take care of themselves

- When appropriate, share struggles and what they are going through
- *What have you learned as a leader of staff who are neurodivergent or have lived experience?*
 - Help support staff so that they have what they need to be successful
 - Learned how strong and resilient staff with lived experience are; they bring valuable perspectives and ways of thinking that makes the work environment richer
 - Importance of self care
 - Importance of leading through vulnerability and providing a safe space to make mistakes
 - Challenging systems and getting people with lived experiences in positions where they can thrive
- *How is your organization decolonizing colonized concepts?*
 - Looking at the reality of history; lean into our own history as well as our strengths; educate self on 10 Principles of Disability Justice; Solidarity; Take the narrative back
 - Honor, respect, and uphold Native American culture

-Main Discussion Points not captured above:

- Shared language includes:
 - Neurodiversity
 - Neurodivergent
 - neurotypical/neuroconforming
 - Masking - concealing ones neurodivergent traits to appear more “acceptable” - leads to burnout and mental health issues
 - Sensory sensitivities
 - Co-occurring
 - Executive functioning
 - Universal Design
 - Colonization
 - decolonization
- Panel members shared their identities, backgrounds, and experiences
- In small groups, attendees reflected on strengths that neurodivergent and lived experiences staff bring to their organizations and identified ways to better support, elevate, and celebrate these contributions
- After the small group, attendees shared what they discussed with the larger group
 - Find ways to celebrate each other and build on our strengths

- Could do a better job of recognizing colleagues who are neurodivergent and have lived experience and be deliberate about supporting those we work with
- Ability to have authentic conversations and bringing staff in and following up with actions
- Utilize a strengths based approach with everyone
- Possibility for structuring roles that allows for flexibility that play to people's strengths, even if it doesn't meet typical roles of the position
- Partnering people together with complementary strengths
- Idea that so much of what we experience and call a disability are conditional (i.e., depend on conditions); together we make the environment and structures that support or detract

-Takeaways or Follow-Ups for JOHS

(expectations/priorities/recommendations/etc):

- Creating an active feedback system that gets reviewed to continually improve working conditions for neurodivergent/people with lived experience
- Creating safe spaces for employees to decompress
- Uplift divergent voices
- Recognize the importance of rest for employees, especially those who work/serve the community more directly
- Continue working towards understanding different needs of employees, with the knowledge that needs will vary from person to person
- Focus on what de-colonization looks like in our organization, prioritize that in the equity plan for other organizations
- Becoming more familiar with the [10 principals of disability Justice](#)