

Neurodiversity and homelessness



Framework
For your future

Agenda

- WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?
- GENERAL CHALLENGES
- ROUGH SLEEPING
- HOUSING SUPPORT SERVICES
- TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION
- WHAT CAN WE DO BETTER?

The topic of this presentation is neurodivergence, for the purpose of the presentation there will be a certain level of generalization, but please keep in mind that every person we work with is an individual and will need different adjustments.

Neurodiversity is very wide umbrella and in this presentation I will be concentrating on autism, ADHD and dyslexia. As I see them the most often within my practice. These are diagnoses that service users will often use to describe their difficulties

Many people who are
rough sleeping are
neurodivergent

Not everyone will have
formal diagnosis

Service users will often
be unaware of
adjustments that can
be made

What else is at play?
Multiple needs

“There are some things I dont understand about myself even now. Like I want to understand why my brain tells me to do that, rather than to do this? Why dont I think before I act?”

Quote from a participant in the “Not naughty, stupid, or bad” report (2023)

“Negative early life experiences, as well as feeling confused and misunderstood, led to self-medicating for over a third of the people we interviewed. Many said they had started drinking or using drugs at a very early age (10-12 years old). Many isolated themselves and started drinking or using drugs to ‘numb’ their feelings or to ‘block’ their condition”. (Not Naughty, stupid, or bad, 2023)

“... statutory commissioned substance misuse treatment, supported housing and welfare benefits services may not be equipped to meet the needs of those with neurodivergent conditions; and conversely that services designed specifically for those with neurodivergent conditions may also not be equipped to meet the needs of those with addictions”. (Towards better and more joined up policy and practice for people with addiction and neurodiversity conditions, 2020)

Some frequent difficulties

(non exhaustive list)

Autism

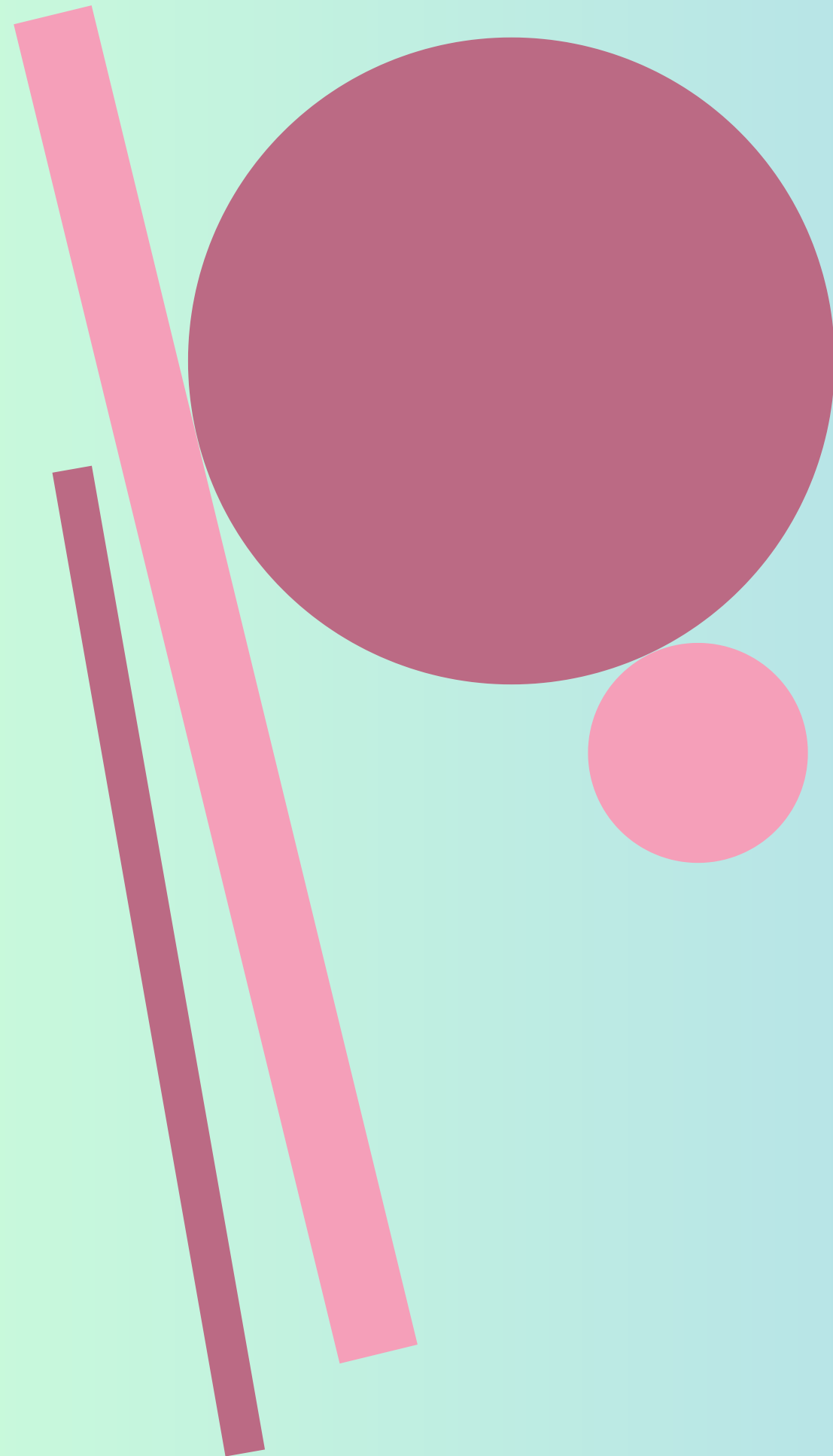
- Social communication
- Social Interactions
- Repetitive behaviour and routines
- Sensory and sensitivity

ADHD

- Forgetfulness
- Restlessness
- Speaking out of turn
- Risk taking
- Difficulty in prioritising appropriately

Dyslexia

- Difficulty reading and writing
- Difficulty understanding written information
- Difficulty understanding written instructions



Personal social challenges, a lack of community understanding, employment disadvantage and discrimination are likely to be key reasons why autistic adults may be more at risk of homelessness. Autistic people can also experience **challenges in communicating and interacting with others.** As such, they are more vulnerable to relationship breakdown, social isolation, and reduced support networks, which can create difficulties in accessing help (family breakdown may be a particular struggle for some autistic people). Research by the National Autistic Society also suggests a lack of social care and welfare support for autistic people. (Autism and Homelessness Toolkit, 2024)

Criminal Justice System

Many rough sleepers are engaging with the Criminal Justice System in some form. Frequent recalls are leading to many rough sleepers having a total reset in their support.

People feeling like they need to cause disruption to get attention

Appointment times too short

Adjustments not made leading to recalls

Frequent changes in times of meeting and workers

Not Naughty, stupid or bad (2023)

On the street

Little control over their environment - city centres where services are concentrated, are often highly crowded.

Lack of routine leading to mental health deterioration.

Belongings removed

How can services provide an appropriate level of consistency?

How can services better understand the routines of their service users?

Housing Support Services

Bright lights, crying children, people shouting and calling out names, people walking around can cause sensory overloads, which can then lead to intense emotional reactions and ban from services.

Is it possible to do assessments over the phone? Is it possible to wait somewhere outside of the main waiting area?

Long waiting time with nothing to concentrate on, many rough sleepers don't have access phones, books or other means of stimulation. The daily need to attend a service in person to be provided with temporary accommodation.

The support of another person who can entertain, fidget toys, colouring?

“Participants who had an autism diagnosis when they approached their local authority explained how this did not usually qualify them for support. They also reported high levels of social anxiety and found it difficult to explain how autism impacted day-to-day functioning”. (The autistic experience of homelessness, 2022)

“Autistics who appear to be functioning like me, society just goes well you are fine you don’t need support, and then there’s nothing, we fall through the cracks, especially as adults . . . [the way that] labels are applied, is generally not how the person is functioning but how well they appear to be functioning, so mild autism is having a mild effect on other people and severe autism is having a severe effect on other people, it’s nothing to do with the individual themselves”. (The autistic experience of homelessness, 2022)

Temporary Accommodation

Accommodation local authorities provide to people who
“a person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness, learning
disability or physical disability”. Homelessness Code of Guidance

People often placed in hotels → Lack of stability and predictability

Missed bookings → Discharged duty → Right to ask for review of suitability

“Consideration of whether accommodation is suitable will require an
assessment of all aspects of the accommodation in the light of the relevant
needs, requirements and circumstances of the homeless person and their
household” (Chapter 17 of Homelessness Code of Guidance)

Hostels

- Transition periods can be challenging
 - How can we enable smoother move ons?
- Accommodation considerations (Autism toolkit)
- People may struggle in understanding rules/personal boundaries
 - Agree set of rules when they move in
- If it doesn't work, why?

“Overcrowding and support needs of other residents led to concerns around confrontation, interpersonal interaction and social anxiety.” (The autistic experience of homelessness, 2022)

“I really cannot cope with the unknown. I need to know what is going on. I need to see picture.” (Autism and homelessness toolkit)”.

Findings from research:

Lack of adaptations being made, without official diagnoses.

Worsening sensory processing difficulties.

Limited control over future housing, causing individuals anxiety.

Frequent quick and unexpected move ons..

Some participants also referred to 'choosing homelessness', opting to sleep rough or stay in squats or vehicles, as opposed to accessing hostels. This was often beneficial, due to the reduction in forced social interaction and control over sensory environment.

The autistic experience of homelessness, 2022

Moment for reflection

“...people on the autism spectrum are more likely to be viewed deceptive and lacking credibility compared to neurotypical individuals...”

Lim, Young and Brewer (2021)

Accommodation considerations

- How can you adapt communication? Get to know people (repetitive behaviour, sensory sensitivity).
- Do they have any sensitive interests?
- Are there any sensory sensitivities?
- How can you help manage change?
- Use of screening tools.
- Advocacy.
- Educating ourselves!

- Can any of the protocols/enviroments of our services be adapted?
 - Involving the views of those with Lived Experience in reviewing processes.
- Better implementation of staff training.
- Raising awareness of different presentations of neurodiversity.

What can we do differently

Use of screening tools.

Advocate with other services
(probation, adult social care).

Facilitating further collaboration within
services (Addictions UK, 2020).

Educating ourselves further and
sharing information with our
colleagues.

Bring neurodiversity into our team's
conversations!

Resources

- Autism and homelessness toolkit
- NHS website (symptoms)
- 'NOT NAUGHTY, STUPID, OR BAD
- Neurodivergence and criminal justice system
- Lim, Young and Brewer (2021) Autistic adults May be Erroneously Percieved as Deceptive and Lacking Credibility. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8813809/>
- Towards better and more joined up policy and practice for people with addiction and neurodiversity conditions.
- The Autistic experience of homelessness