AT-Autism

Thursday 5 March 2020

'Autism-friendly' environments. Can Universal Design bring success?

Summary of discussion groups

Feedback analysed to identify **common** themes.

An analysis of the most used terms and points was undertaken with the most commonly used terms more prominently shown in the word cloud.

1. Main points
2. Barriers and potential barriers
3. Possible solutions (What to do about it)

Results of analysis below

1. Main points. Top 5 points related to developing an 'autism friendly' inclusive approach or policy
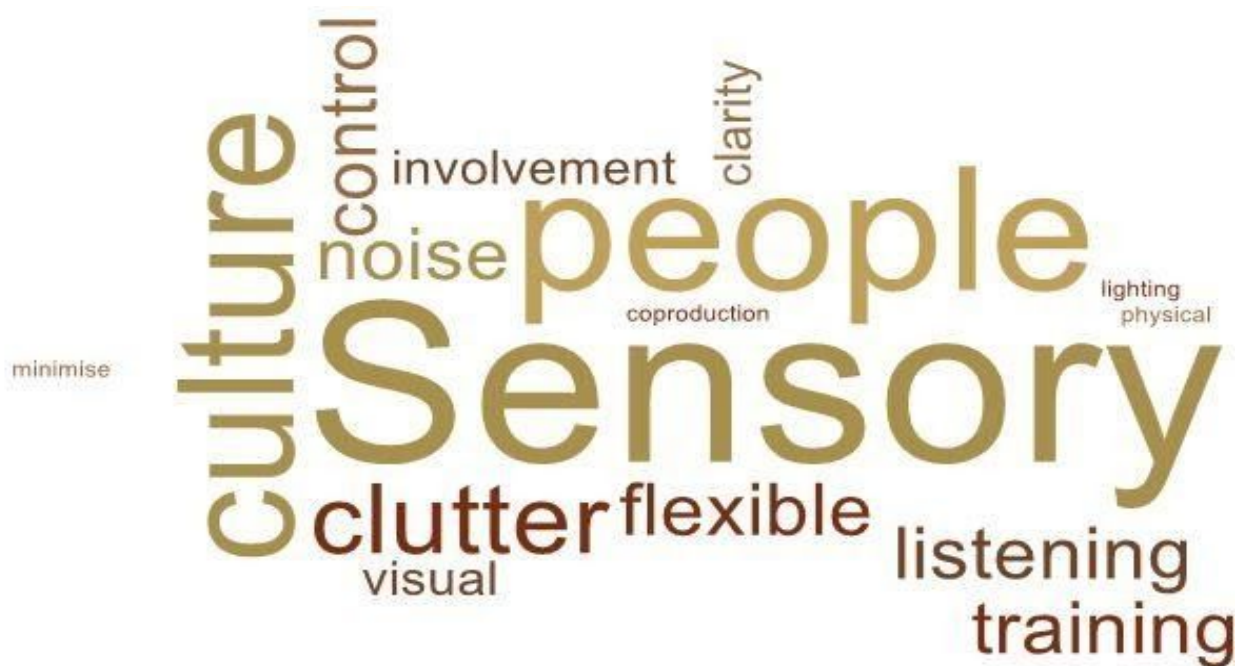
Common themes

- Sensory considerations require particular attention. Invariably underestimated, over simplified or misunderstood. Dominance of visual domain.
- People make a difference – their understanding critical (training) and can compensate where other changes are impossible.
- Culture. Awareness of impact of culture on outcomes. Changing cultures through education and modelling is key to progress. All cultures, especially organisational.

- Listening to neurodivergent people – co production. Develop agency and wherever possible aim to bring things within the individual's control.
- Flexibility – recognition of need for clear standards that will reduce need for reasonable adjustment. Aim for the general good but retain a focus on neurodevelopmental needs.
- Nuanced application across a wide range of settings, reflecting wide and varied need.

2. Barriers and potential barriers.

unaware stigma unempathic resistance othering multiplicity buildings space rigidity language acceptance noise cost none attitudes culture mindset inflexibility ignorance communication tokenism misunderstanding

Common themes

- Cultures – resistant to change risk averse -top-down hierarchies.
- Rigidity and inflexibility in interpretation.
- Attitudes, mindsets and lack of empathy – 'othering' and exclusion of neurodiverse people – not involving or listening. Tokenism.
- Cost – or perceived cost of making adjustments to existing and new buildings. 'Entitlement' to reasonable adjustment dependent on diagnosis.
- Lack of awareness knowledge -ignorance.
- Physical space unable to be modifed.
- Conflicting needs or demands -variability.

3. Possible solutions (what to do about it)

Common themes

- Training. Develop training to inform and increase awareness understanding of the issues and acceptance – cultural change. Recognition that persistence and experimentation will be needed but may not always work.
- Co-production and involvement of neurodivergent people in changing culture and practice by informing and developing design, standards, research and policy of socially beneficial (valid) changes. Participation to enable everyone to have greater control over key aspects of their environment. Policies to take account of neurodiverse features (e.g. in access, employment, education) and need for clarity and predictability. Smart technologies can help if developed through understanding and listening to range of neurodivergent and autistic voices. Intersectionality.
- Changing culture will require a multi-pronged approach. Some will be easier than others. Access by design not by accident
- Standards. Development of clear, specific standards around **UD principles** and well communicated. Adaptation of existing accessibility and design standards to incorporate Universal Design as and on impact neurodivergent people. (e.g. Buildings, HR, Transport, communication).
- Sensory environment and adjustments to be recognised as significant and remain central to all aspects.
- Broader than autism. Intersectionality increasingly important and should be recognised. Over focus on one aspect unhelpful. Clarification on terminology important

Comments from participants

"making people aware and showing them what to do is so important"

"sight the dominant sense" "clutter a huge issue"

"making things more predictable reduces stress and anxiety and increases tolerance"

"with new buildings better to start with a blank canvas and add in than have to take away"

"autism-friendly places are where you don't have to justify yourself"

"maybe include educating people about neurodiversity at school"

"teachers should be aware"

"awareness of effects of colour, especially primary colours is so important"

"all envioments and process should be audited for autism-friendliness"

"important to individualise as part of reasonable adjustment- ask people what they need in advance"

"Statutory guidance should be expanded- inclusion in regulatory standards"

"lack of clarity on what is meant by the term 'autism-friendly' – means many things to many people. Work needed"

"good that flexible working now accepted – encouraged to work from home but structure needed"

"Recognising what can be changed and what should be managed- some things (like noise) just can't be fixed"

"too often people afraid of getting it wrong"

"avoidance of stigmatisining through reasonable adjustment"

"making use of new smart technology yet to be exploited"

"Lacks an evidence base"

"a priority for HR departments"

"need for proper training for schools and employers particularly"

"recognise importance of good design- and not just in buildings"

"what's good for neurodivergent people tends to be good for everyone"

Appendix 1.

Universal design.

The Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University expounds the following principles:

1. Equitable use
2. Flexibility in use
3. Simple and intuitive
4. Perceptible information
5. Tolerance for Error
6. Low physical effort
7. Size and space for approach and use

Each principle is succinctly defined and broader than those of 'accessible design' and 'barrier-free' design.

Principle	Summary definition
1.Equitable use	Same rights as for everyone else.
2.Flexibility in use	Can be adapted when changes occur or needs dictate
3.Simple and intuitive	Natural. Not requiring conscious thought/consideration
4.Perceptible information	Ease of communication and perception
5.Tolerance for Error	Not dependant on everything working perfectly. Works even on a bad day
6.Low physical effort	Easy to use and access without need for additional resource
7.Size and space for approach and use	There is enough space for all who use.