

NEURO KEY

An Alliance supporting people
with neurological conditions

SUPPORTING DYSLEXIA AT WORK

‘Unlocking minds and opening doors’

Open Door series by Neuro Key



Contents

Foreword	3
Jasmine's Story	4
Greg's story	6
Anna's story	8
Advice	10
Acknowledgements	11
Further Information	11
References	12

Foreword

- Approximately **10% of the British population have dyslexia**, for 4% this is more severe. Ratio of **1:7 of workers with neuro diverse abilities** (dyslexia) to those without (British Dyslexia Association, 2018)
- TUC - **2.9 million employees** affected by dyslexia, not all will have been assessed (Hagan, 2014)
- Issues with reading, writing, memory, organisation, time management - **not just administrative or office-based work affected** (Moody, 2012)
- Impact of dyslexia on **self-esteem**, deterring individuals from applying for jobs and promotion (Bell, 2010) and high levels of negative emotions linked to **lower levels of self-efficacy** at work (Nalavany et al., 2018)
- BDA (2018) outlined **talents of neuro diverse employees** - design, problem solving, empathic, identify patterns, creative, interactive skills and oral skills
- **Benefits of effective adjustments in the workplace** – greater retention of staff and skills, plus the organisation moves in line with equality law (Macdonald & Cosgrove, 2019)

Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling. Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed. Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities. It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points. Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia.

(Rose, 2009, p.9)

The following stories are real life narratives from interviews with people who have been assessed for dyslexia in adulthood through their work. They have been given fictional names to protect their identities.

October 2022

Jasmine's story

In school, I didn't really have any issues, I just used to study a lot because I had the time. It sounds really sad, but I think I got really good grades in my GCSEs, and A's in English, just purely because I loved it. Also, I'm quite creative. I did have high anxiety, but it wasn't just dyslexia, it was a mixture of that and childhood trauma. But in college, I didn't understand what they meant by some things and used to get the structure mixed up quite a bit when writing. I probably got away with what I'd written because I was so passionate about English. But I probably spent a lot longer than other people as I went over and over it, and re-edited it and re-done it, so that it appeared really good.

I did a psychology degree and got a 2:2. I was gutted cos I could have got a 2:1 with three more marks. I used to spend a lot of time on my work and used text to speech software because of anxiety and chronic fatigue. People would say, I've done this and that this weekend, and I'm like, how? I've been doing this all weekend. I wanted to work with children, perhaps educational psychology or something. The dyslexia definitely impacted because I probably would have got a higher grade, then done a masters, as they were all asking for 2:1s or a First. I probably would have been on a higher wage instead of struggling with money during my life.

I had struggles in some jobs, like thinking I'd given the correct change, but the till wasn't right. They knew I wasn't stealing but it was really distressing. So, I had to pick jobs very carefully. I found call centre jobs stressful and ended up leaving, cos I hadn't got the diagnosis then. I had anxiety and other issues at home, so it was a mixture of things. My dad thought I was irresponsible leaving my jobs, not really understanding why I couldn't do better. I never felt good enough, so it really affected me. I think he probably just wanted me to get a good job.

After university, I trained in children's nursing, doing absolutely amazing in my final placement. So, I passed it and went to be a children's nurse on a general ward.

But I was struggling... more patients, verbal handovers, less structure than my training. I couldn't take information in, so

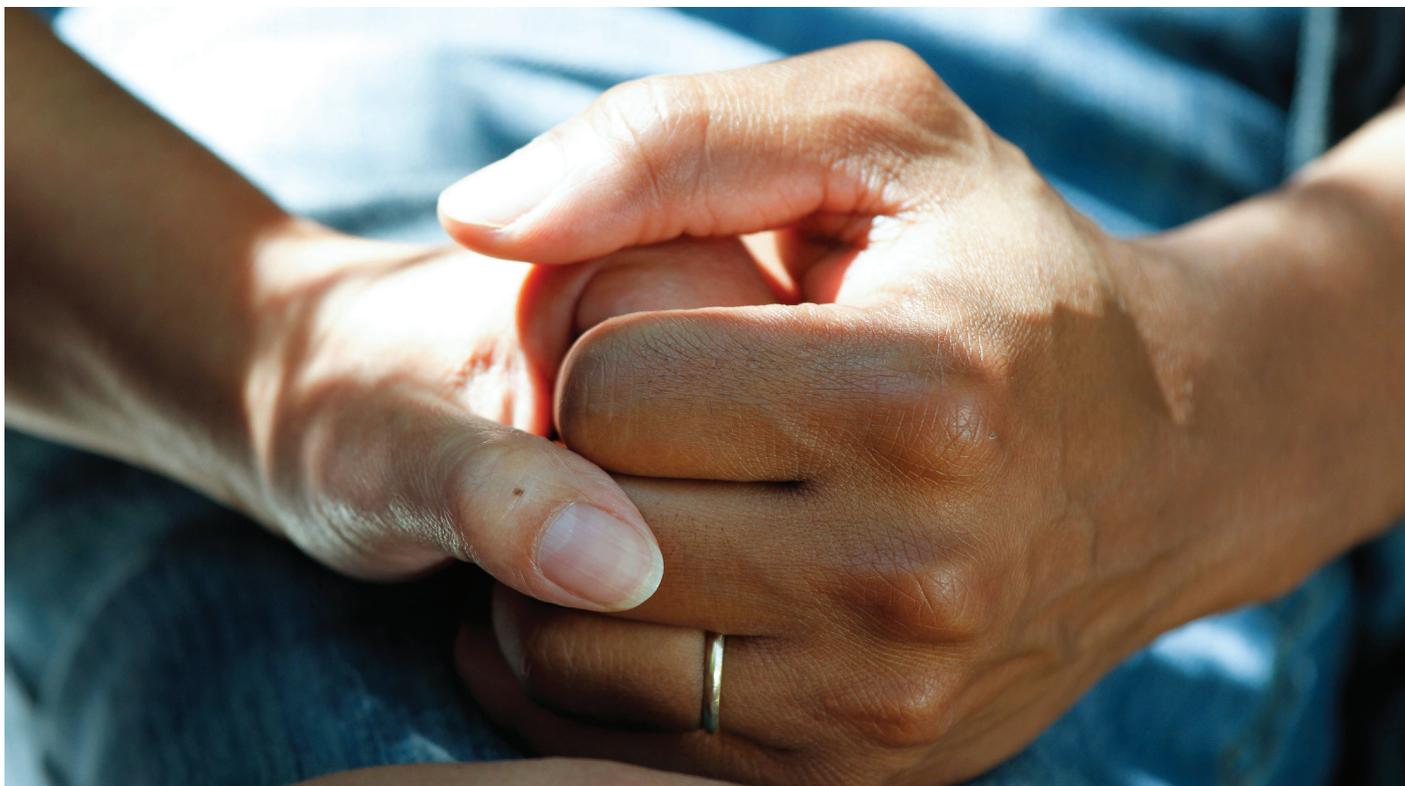
that became distressing. I'd write down a child's height and the ward sister would say that's not correct. I started making mistakes and was getting more anxious.

But they didn't support me, and my mentor was a bit of a bully, reporting that I was incompetent. I think they were jealous because I done the accelerated training. It was really disappointing and upsetting. My mentor actually had dyslexia but didn't pick it up.

Within six months they'd referred me to the nursing council, and if I didn't win the case, they'd put sanctions on my practice or strike me off. I was so stressed. I know I forgot things, but I wouldn't leave a child in danger. But I was cleared by the council who said work hadn't supported me enough.

It put me off nursing for life, I left at the end of the year. I had low self-esteem and thought I was forgetful and stupid, that I had let myself down. With support, I might have even become a senior nurse. All those opportunities, it's quite sad really, just a struggle.

I still wanted to work with children so became a residential care officer but was disappointed in myself and beat myself up. I even tried a management position, but it was overwhelming, and I couldn't think properly, and got stressed out. There was a colleague getting tested for dyslexia and he mentioned auditory dyslexia, and I started to notice that if it's a noisy environment I literally cannot read or write. My colleague encouraged me, and work helped with the assessment cost.



I felt comfortable talking to my manager. After the experience with nursing, I wanted people to realise it's not my fault.

The assessment process was quite an eye opener and offered light at the end of the tunnel, because I knew I wasn't stupid. The report matched how I felt, like there was just bits missing. It helped with weaknesses, strengths, and techniques for work and outside.

I phoned my aunty saying, this is why I made these mistakes. I just cried because I was so relieved, it was like a weight lifted off my shoulders. Prior to the assessment, I had no idea what was going on. It explained why I'd forget friends' birthdays or forget to meet up. My dad also now realises that it wasn't my fault.

I currently work as a teaching assistant in school. I go somewhere quiet to read my emails but can't read or write if other staff come in. They asked if I wanted any help at the start, and I said I'd let them know. Now I tell people, you

need to write it down for us, I'm just having a dyslexic day, so they understand. I use my sense of humour, that helps. But it makes you feel a bit stupid, I still doubt myself. But it boosted my confidence recently, when I was looking after a pupil with diabetes, cos it's the first medical thing I've done in school. I was a bit obsessive, and triple checked, but it's proof I can do it. I'm also doing a copywriter course for myself, so I can work freelance from home. I can go sit in a café, with my laptop, if my stepdaughter's home. I just can't work if I get interrupted.

I've learned I'm good at problem solving, design, creative and visual stuff, and I can get on with anyone. So, there are positives, but it doesn't outweigh the negative. I still feel at a disadvantage. I know I could go for a higher position but feel I wouldn't cope. No-one's going to employ me if I put, I've got poor organisational skills. It's a double-edged sword, do I want people knowing or not?

Greg's story

That school that's just outside my door was absolutely horrible. The teachers were all horrible, I was just a thick idiot that was in their classroom, because that was the law. They called my father cos I wasn't doing very well. He kicked me all the way home, threw me in me room, threw the book at me. He couldn't read the book, and I still didn't read the book, I just hated school even more. I should have been put into one of those special schools. Why wasn't I given extra help? I didn't have exams, wasn't even asked to go in the room. I was making cups of tea for the old folk doing tea dance. I think the school were hiding wor in the system somewhere, just sort of put them in a broom cupboard till the end of the day. We weren't even in a set, you know, top, bottom, middle. I was born twenty year too early, the lack of technology affected me getting qualifications.

I started work at fifteen. Coming from here I always would have went into a manual labour job, they're gonna work in whatever industry the family comes from. I don't think it would change it any great sway if we'd been educated. I was in the coal industry for ten year. You did a daily report, and the old fitter knew me and my father couldn't read or write, so he put a list of words on the wall. That was enough to get by with the reports.

Since 2001, I've been an installer on building sites. I did a couple of courses and qualified in Fire Protection Inspection. Then I saw a job advertised, it stated a certain level of education, but they didn't question it. You got ten years' experience, a qualification, when can you start? I explained I hadn't written reports, but he says, it's a copy paste job. I didn't think it was gonna have any impact, thought I could blag it, get away with it. But when the work started, I realised the amount of written reports, my education was failing me. There was no set format, so I started copying old reports. But my writing wasn't up to pace, my spelling was atrocious, and I didn't understand the grammar. I started getting very frustrated. Work got checked by inspectors, but then had to be approved by someone else, who would fail it. Six months down the line, they sorted out the management. By then I

knew the job and the tricks, this impressed them. I just didn't know how to write it up.

I knew there was always an issue, so had the dyslexia assessment myself. The process was scary, just getting through the doors. Getting the report was, yeah, the teachers got it wrong. It was like a necessary step, so I could progress. But it wasn't easy to find, not publicised enough for us older folk that need it. I had a look on YouTube, a young girl doing exams with extra time, dyslexia report in place. That's what I wanted.

So, the manager had suspicions as my work kept coming back for rewrite, but never mentioned it. Then another inspector called me in front of everybody in a meeting, it wasn't very pleasant.

So, I emailed the report and my manager worked with us about getting the reports improved. He tried to hide it for me at first. It also caused a bit of backfiring, the guy got disciplinary and apologised for being nasty. And everything is really good now to be honest. I'm not afraid of telling the girls in the office to correct work before they post it. My reports are mostly turned around the same day, very rare do I get one sent back. I am a bit of a workaholic, do twenty hours extra in a week, but I need that extra time. That's old school thinking, work hard, do what the gaffer says, do more than anybody else. I get called 'Golden Boy', that's been the same on every job, 'Factory Cat', 'Overtime King'. Turn up first, work weekends, put myself through courses. My manager has supported me 100% and he's pushing me to be deputy manager. I wouldn't ever have gone for it myself.

I get approached for big job offers, big money. I'm saying no because I'm frightened of the writing up. Three year ago, I was headhunted for a company in Germany. Started the job, I literally freaked... panicked and then come home. I normally bypass that section about good maths and English. I believe I can hide it and work my way through it, but not there. Why hide it? It's a bloody embarrassing thing. If you say that, I don't think you're getting a foot through the door.

So, I've been doing this job for three year, and can write a 100-page report. I have Grammarly on the screens where I do my reports, if it wasn't for that I would be completely knackered. But I've still got my demons, the worst is the word 'there', I'll probably always get it wrong. But as the tech gets better, people fighting those demons, there will be less of it.

It still comes out though, like last year, I did a lead auditor course with an exam. I emailed for extra time, didn't say what for. I don't use the word dyslexia, I don't like using it. We're just labelled as thick. When you say dyslexic, sorta can't read, can't write, can't spell, yet I can read, I can spell and I can write. It's a written exam after forty hours training but they rushed it onto online. Gave me twenty minutes extra. I understood the questions but got half what I needed in the exam. I lost me confidence, kicked all over down the road.

I wished I'd found out earlier. I would have likely had the same career path but would have gettin' there faster. But maybe that's got a little bonus behind it. I'm hungry, I'm greedy, I want to show them. When I started, the inspector would come and check my work. Yeah, I'm sitting in his seat now.



Anna's story

I went to an academic school and believe some issues were raised, but my mum chose to ignore them. Her answer was a work-hard ethic and to get a tutor. A maths tutor wrote a letter that my mum never showed me. I suspect they spotted the dyslexia. I thrived under a maths teacher who was creative, he drew diagrams. I loved his classes but still felt a bit out of place. I was always pulled up for messy work and not being organised. At secondary school I went into pretty much top set for everything, but each year I moved down and down and down and down. So, I always felt a bit crappy about school, it wasn't a happy place.

My parents wanted to provide a good education, so I could be a teacher or a lawyer or something. My sister was academic, very logical and thrived in that kind of practice. We were different, I think I was seen as kind of flaky. My answer was to work harder, till crazy o'clock, but it still wasn't good enough.

At University I studied French and English. To begin with, I loved it, friendships, and everything. But then it wasn't working, and I felt disconnected. Too much reading and note taking. Rather than think for yourself, it was, write this, memorise it, recreate it. I was depressed and went home mid first year. My mum's reaction was for me to get a new skill, a shorthand course.

Afterwards, I went back to my roots, about people, and went to study psychology. This took a lot of courage. At the end, I was borderline 2:1. I remember feeling, and being made to feel by my parents, that this wasn't good enough. My dissertation had massive typing errors, although I had all the ideas. It's really frustrating looking back.

In my twenties, I started to wonder if I had ADHD, or something affecting organisation. I thought you can't read with dyslexia and I loved reading. Then I saw a documentary about Kara Tointon from Strictly and recognised how words move around for me too. In my early thirties, I thought about exploring it but was told it wouldn't change anything, so I didn't get assessed.

For my occupational psychology master's, I remember doing it differently, doing it my way, coloured paper, mind maps, background music. I've been orientated towards coaching people, helping people be at their best. What's been difficult is systems, processes, documentation.

I've been very successful as a business consultant. It's felt challenging and draining at times, but the tipping point was returning after maternity leave. Two kids, work changes, technology, travel, new manager, a lot of spinning plates, it all came to a head. That's when I knew I needed to do something about it. My coping strategies weren't gonna serve me anymore.

I still have that doubt, does dyslexia mean I'm not good enough? I understand it a bit more due to my diagnosis, but that doesn't mean it's easier to deal with. The pieces of the puzzle fit together now but didn't when I was younger. If people get diagnosed younger, you see the world differently, it's your superpower.

I used to have autonomy, exceeded targets, delivered great results, kept clients happy. But after maternity leave, there was more focus on writing and recording, where success looked like logical linear thinking. This kind of work tripped me up. It's so painful to write stuff, I'd rather just do a brain dump. I felt exposed, embarrassed about my messy work, and judged, I guess. The manager was measuring me on

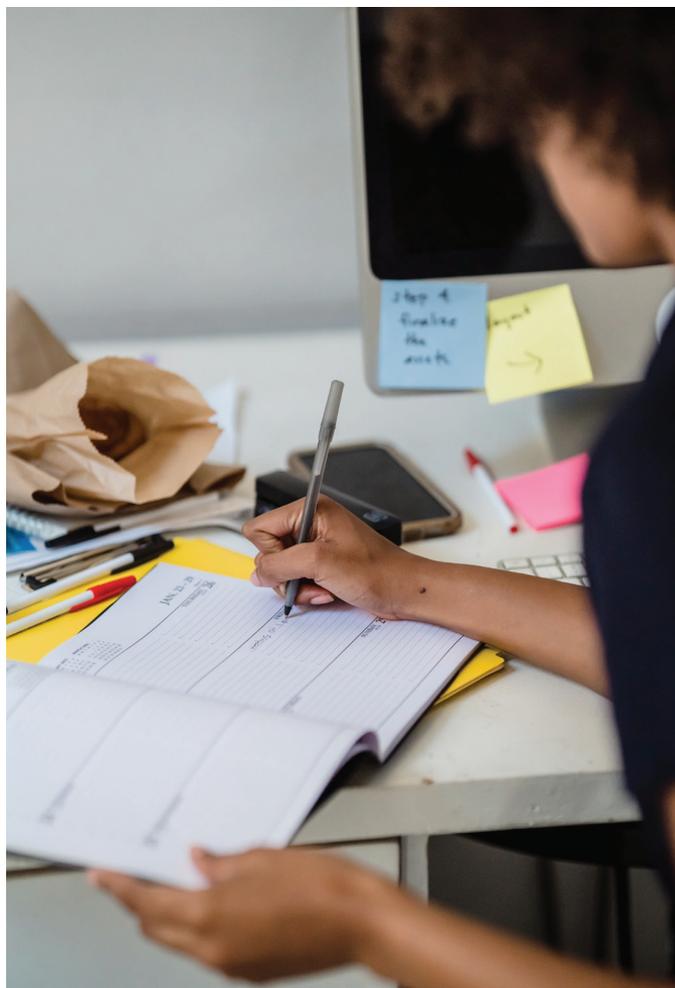
output but couldn't really see what I was doing. I felt anxiety and stress. When I did a resilience questionnaire it made me realise, I was on the brink of burnout. My line manager didn't do anything differently.

I didn't find work supportive, so I organised the assessment for dyslexia myself. It was just before I turned forty, so quite late on. I was nervous but felt validated by the end. It was helpful having a chat, rather than just sending a report. Afterwards I felt quite daunted and a bit sad. I thought of the dissertation, the dents to self-esteem and missed opportunities. I guess a bit of grief really, feeling let down by school.

Work arranged a performance meeting, based on a biased view of my weaknesses, but not balancing that out with strengths. I explained about the dyslexia, but they didn't offer adjustments. When I asked for a workplace assessment, they wouldn't give me one, but offered to find someone to proofread if needed. My employer saw dyslexia as my problem, with no willingness to adjust on their part. They expected high performance in a challenging job, so this wasn't a great experience. It made me question myself and feel quite stupid. I wish there had been more support and my old manager had stuck up for me more. I didn't think employment legislation would protect me.

The reason work turned itself around wasn't because they adjusted, but my own judgement of myself stopped. It was ok to find things hard and to ask for help. I felt good when colleagues were happy to help me. However, my coping strategies relied on doing extra hours. Eat dinner then be back in the office at ten o'clock at night.

When I gave notice, my old director was gutted, saying I brought something different to the team due to my big brain. I can take on big projects, join the dots and see things clearly and quickly. In my mind, problems become quite simple as I see connections and try different things. I like productive meetings, capture it, get it written down there and then.



I'm starting a new job where I have routine, an intact team and one location. I think that'll help. I'm super excited but worried. I didn't disclose at assessment. I want to be assessed as other people and see if I can do that job. I didn't want to make a fuss and start off being a drama queen. I'm hoping I'll be brave enough to share with my manager when I start.

Advice on supporting dyslexia in work

Challenge	Advice
Being under pressure at work	Discuss workload expectations at time of recruitment and in regular follow ups Provide a clear structure for work tasks and sufficient time to complete them Explore technology solutions to make work more efficient
Administration tasks	Provide training on new systems (ideally in person) Provide information in alternative formats and provide document templates Provide technology for reading, writing, proofreading, note taking
Information processing, memory and concentration	Provide information in a suitable format in advance of meetings Make use of password managers/biometric software Encourage colleagues to be uninterruptable at times Provide working memory training
Disclosure and assessment for dyslexia	Provide dyslexia awareness training for staff to encourage a supportive culture Provide clear information on disclosure, support and funding for assessment Make use of the Access to Work scheme
Lack of support at work	Put reasonable adjustments in place & provide spaces for using assistive technology Be inclusive by providing opportunities and rewards for all staff Check if work issues are dyslexia-related before managing performance
Self confidence	Ensure systems and procedures support success at work Provide mental health support and confidence building training Create a supportive culture where colleagues can offer ideas and innovate Create a culture aiming for 'good enough' rather than 'perfection'
Working long hours and shift work	Create a culture of reasonable working hours and check staff if working long hours Encourage staff to work at their most productive times of day where possible Provide regular work patterns whenever possible
Work environments	Provide a quiet environment or noise cancelling headphones Provide a private workspace if possible and allow home working if suitable Encourage the use of assistive technology to reduce mistakes
Working online	Use two presenters for delivering online training and ensure IT support is available Provide face to face work and training when possible Provide assistive technology, e.g., screen reading software Encourage non-work online social occasions, e.g., virtual coffee breaks
Work based studies and training	Ensure tutors are dyslexia aware and encourage disclosure by trainees/students Adapt training/study materials and assessments to provide reasonable adjustments Allow flexible working and study leave
Recruitment and promotion	Make reasonable adjustments to recruitment process, e.g., format, extra time Provide clear information and support for promotion, encourage study and training Provide clear information about senior roles and possible reasonable adjustments Provide a safe and supportive environment for the disclosure of dyslexia
Strengths of dyslexia not used	Make use of strengths and talents of adults with dyslexia: innovative thinking, problem solving, connecting, empathic and creative skills

Acknowledgements

This resource has been created by Dr Tracey Gormally, CPsychol Practitioner Psychologist and would not have been possible without her research work exploring these individuals' stories. Clearly this resource primarily relies on the courage and generosity of Jasmine, Greg and Anna, who are thanked for their time, openness and selflessness in offering their stories to raise awareness.

Tracey also expresses appreciation for the opportunity she had to work in partnership with Dr Paul Sander and Dr Stephanie Kiling from Teesside University, and Dyslexia North East England who work so hard to raise awareness about dyslexia and provide support to individuals, families and organisations.

Further information available from

Neuro Key

St Mary's Centre, Corporation Road,
Middlesbrough TS1 2RW

T: 01642 641825

E: admin@na-tvdny.org.uk

W: <https://www.na-tvdny.org.uk>



Dyslexia North East England

T: 07868 263696

E: info@dne.org.uk

W: <https://dyslexiane.org.uk>



The British Dyslexia Association

Office 205, Access Business Centre,
Willoughby Road, Bracknell, RG12 8FB

T: 0333 405 4555

W: <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk>



Further information

UK Government: Reasonable adjustments for workers with disabilities or health conditions

W: <https://www.gov.uk/reasonable-adjustments-for-disabled-workers>

UK Government: Access to work scheme

W: <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

Equality and Human Rights Commission – Guide to Workplace Adjustments

W: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/multipage-guide/employment-workplace-adjustments>

Contact page:

W: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/contact-us>

Equality Advisory and Support Service (part of Equality & Human Rights Commission)

FREEPOST, EASS Helpline, FPN6521

W: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/contact-us/equality-advisory-and-support-service>

E: contact form on the EASS website

<http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/app/ask>

T: 0808 800 0082 Textphone: 0808 800 0084

References

Bell, S. (2010). Inclusion for adults with dyslexia: **Examining the transition periods of a group of adults in England: Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs**, 10(3), 216-226

British Dyslexia Association. (2018). **Showcasing the ND workplace**, www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

Hagan, B. (2014). **Dyslexia in the Workplace: a TUC Guide** (3rd ed.). London: TUC publications

Macdonald, S. J., & Cosgrove, F. (2019). **Dyslexia and policing: Understanding the impact that dyslexia has in the police service in England and Wales. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal**, 38(6), 634-651

Nalavany, B. A., Logan, J. M., & Carawan, L. W. (2018). **The relationship between emotional experience with dyslexia and work self-efficacy among adults with dyslexia. Dyslexia**, 24(1), 17-32

Rose, J. (2009). **Identifying and Teaching Children with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families**

NEURO KEY

An Alliance supporting people with neurological conditions

Our Open Door series is collectively created to share our expertise and ultimately, benefit the whole neuro community. However, we need to sustain this Charity. If this resource has been useful for you, we would appreciate a donation to help keep the work going.

Scan the QR code with a smartphone and go to the donation page on our website.



Tees Valley Durham and North
Yorkshire Neurological Alliance
Registered Charity No: 1119043

Design by www.nickballdesign.co.uk

