VIOLENCE REDUCTION NETWORK

LEICESTER, LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND

Effective support for neurodivergent young people in the criminal justice system

VRN Briefing No.11

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Executive summary

Introduction

Neurodiversity is an umbrella term which refers to the fact that there are natural differences in how people process information and how their brains work.[1] It takes a strengths-based approach meaning that neurodiversity highlights the positive qualities that arise from these normal variations in how people's brains operate.[2] However, because society, including the criminal justice system (CJS), is structured based on the experience of the neurotypical population, neurodivergent individuals face systemic barriers in society. Across the United Kingdom, neurodivergent individuals are over-represented in the CJS. For example, in Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland (LLR) it was found that 75% of young people suspected of a serious offence had special education needs.[3]

In the spring of 2023, Rocket Science, an independent research consultancy, was commissioned by the LLR Violence Reduction Network (VRN) to research effective support for neurodivergent young people in the criminal justice system (CJS). This research answers the following research questions:

- What does effective support look like for those with neurodivergent conditions in the criminal justice system?
- How are the needs of children and young people with neurodivergent conditions currently met when interacting with the police, youth justice, and VRN commissioned services in LLR?
- How could local CJS partners improve support for children and young people with neurodivergent conditions?

This report summarises the findings from this research, which included a rapid evidence review, consultation with 23 CJS professionals in LLR via interviews and focus groups, and a survey which was distributed to staff of CJS partners in LLR. The survey received 30 responses in total.

[1] Revolving Doors. (2022). Exploring the Links Between Neurodiversity and the Revolving Door of Crisis and Crime. Link
[2] Day, A.M. (2021). Disabling and Criminalising Systems? Understanding the Experiences and Challenges Facing Justice Experienced, Neurodiverse Children in the Education and Youth Justice Systems. Link
[3] Violence Reduction Network for LLR. (2023). Serious Violence Strategic Needs Assessment. Link

Findings

Experience and outcomes for neurodivergent young people

Although there was evidence of professionals across CJS partners having a good understanding of neurodiversity and adapting their practice accordingly, this is not seen consistently in policy or practice across the CJS in Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland. The survey revealed that over-three quarters of respondents believed that the CJS as a whole only sometimes or rarely meets the needs of neurodivergent young people. Similarly, a large majority of survey respondents believed that neurodivergent young people had both worse experiences and worse outcomes than their neurotypical peers. However, in the qualitative fieldwork, some practitioners expressed how they felt that this trend was starting to equalise, as young people received individualised support and their needs were being recognised.

Knowledge and awareness

Overall, knowledge about neurodiversity among CJS professionals and partner organisations was mixed. Although some professionals believed that they had a thorough knowledge of neurodiversity and were confident in their ability to identify additional needs and adapt their practice accordingly, this was not consistent. A number of research participants identified a lack of sufficient knowledge. These differences in levels of knowledge were attributed to the varying amounts of training delivered to different teams, individual initiative to seek out training, personal experience, and work history.

Training and education are essential to increasing individual's knowledge about neurodiversity, recognising additional needs, adapting practice to meet these needs, and dispelling stereotypes. From the good practice identified in the evidence review, more in depth training would support professionals to increase their knowledge on the breadth of neurodiversity, including deeper understanding of how it can intersect with gender, ethnicity, and culture. It is recommended that a comprehensive training needs analysis should be conducted across CJS partners in LLR to inform future priorities concerning the content, audience, and timeframes for a training programme.

In addition, creating opportunities for practitioners to come together to share their experiences of what works, what does not work, and their expertise, will help improve staff knowledge and increase the dialogue around neurodiversity among CJS partners.

Several CJS professionals in both the interviews and survey reflected that young people and their families had not received any support or information after receiving a diagnosis, and sometimes did not understand how their condition may affect their behaviour or cognition. They believed that if the young people and their families had better knowledge of neurodiversity, this would allow the practitioners to be able to more effectively support them.

To ensure action, a multi-disciplinary task and finish group, responsible for reviewing documentation and interventions, commissioning training, and mapping support, should be created to help unify the approach taken across CJS partners in LLR.

Communication and environmental adaptions

The importance of communication and adaptations to the physical environment in the support of neurodivergent individuals was highlighted in interviews with staff, survey, and the good practice review. All communication should be kept simple and clear, being sure to avoid jargon, figurative speech, acronyms, or idioms. In the focus groups and interviews, practitioners consistently highlighted communication as an area where they were comfortable in effectively supporting neurodivergent young people, with staff citing some adaptions already in place, including the custody leaflet. To ensure

effective communication across the CJS, all information must be available in easy-read and visual formats, and young people should be given summary sheets containing all important information. Importantly, staff need to be aware that these adaptions are available, know when they may be needed, and ensure to verify that the young person has accurately understood the information communicated to them by using open-ended questions.

Adapting the physical environment of the CJS is also important for ensuring effective support for neurodivergent individuals, especially for those with sensory difficulties. Evidence from LLR shows how adaptions to the custody suite are already being made by offering quiet and calmer spaces, fidget toys, and softer furnishings. Although evidence of these adaptions was described by many professionals, the custody suite was often used as an example. Across all CJS partners, it should be reviewed to see if adaptions to the physical environment could be made to better support those with sensory difficulties.

To help remind staff of what communication and environmental adaptions can be made, evidence from the good practice review suggested tools such as a summary sheets or a catalogue, as a helpful resource for professionals to consult.

Resources

Across all elements of the research, the importance of taking an individualised and holistic approach to working with young people was consistently highlighted. To facilitate this, at the outset of any interaction with young people, all practitioners should directly ask the individual if they have any additional needs or require alternative support in order to effectively engage, and promptly put these adjustments in place if available.

However, in both the survey and interviews, CJS professionals noted that many teams do not have the time, resources, or budget to be able to work with each young person in this individualised way. Although this varied between teams, easier access to resources and expertise was identified as a need. This will help ensure that staff are supported in their work and that a tailored approach can be taken be all staff.

Information sharing

Finally, in both the good practice review and the interviews and focus groups, the importance of sharing information among and between CJS professionals was highlighted as a key gap in terms of effectively supporting neurodivergent young people as they move through the CJS. In both the qualitative research and survey, CJS professionals continuously described the difficulty in accessing data on a young person's diagnosis or additional support needs from both within the CJS and from education providers. Similarly, how this information is recorded on internal systems was often reported to be confusing. Improving systems for recording and communication information about neurodiverse conditions and other additional needs will help CJS effectively support neurodivergent young people. We also recommend the support that School Liaison Officers can play in obtaining information from the education system is reviewed.

Recommendations

From the findings of the research, a set of recommendations were developed. These are presented in the infographic below.

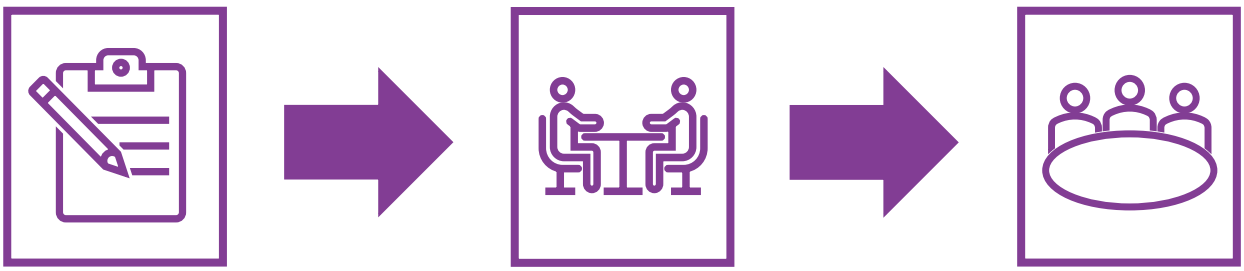
Create a task and finish group responsible for reviewing the support for neurodivergent young people in the CJS, commissioning training, and developing educational materials.

Young people should always be asked if they have any additional needs or require alternative support.

Conduct a training needs analysis to inform a programme of regular training for all CJS staff on identifying neurodiversity, adapting communications, and managing behaviours. The training should also incorporate lived experience.

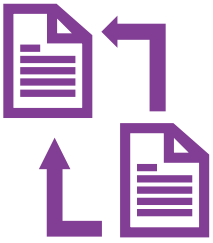
Neurodivergent young people and their families should receive support to understand more about their condition and how it may affect them.

All information should be communicated simply and clearly. It should also be available in easy-read and visual formats, including flow charts, timelines, body diagrams and summary sheets. Staff should check understanding through open-ended questions.



Where possible the physical environment should be adapted to better support those with sensory needs. This can include reducing lighting, having quiet rooms available, or providing ear defenders.

Ensure that resources are easily available so that staff can male more frequent use of them. This will help ensure that hey can take an individualised approach to working with all young people.



Improve systems for recording and communicating information about neurodiversity and additional needs so that CJS practitioners are aware of any additional needs and support a young person requires.

Consider if and how School Liaison Officers can support with the sharing of information between schools and the CJS, particularly in relation to the indication of young people identified with SEND needs and ECHP.

Introduction

Neurodiversity is an umbrella term which refers to the fact that there are natural differences in how people process information and how their brains work.[4] There is no universally agreed definition of neurodiversity, however, neurodiverse conditions include: autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, and traumatic brain injury (TBI). Neurodiversity is a strength-based approach, which highlights the positive qualities that arise from the normal variations in how peoples' brains work.[5] Nonetheless, society, including the criminal justice system, is structured based on the experiences of the neurotypical population. Therefore, even though neurodiversity celebrates strengths, neurodivergent individuals often face many systemic barriers in society.

National level data indicates that neurodiverse conditions are prevalent amongst those in contact with the criminal justice system (CJS). Among children and young people, it is estimated that up to 90% of those in custody may have a communication disorder. [5] In Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland (LLR), previous research has shown that three-quarters (75%) of young people suspected of a serious violent offence had special education needs.[6] However, the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection recently reported that across CJS staff in England and Wales, there was consistently low levels of awareness and knowledge of neurodiversity. [7] Due to the high prevalence of neurodiverse conditions among people in contact with the CJS, some have argued that neurodiversity should be considered the 'norm', rather than the minority within the CJS, and that this should be reflected in the support available to young people in the CJS.[4]

In February 2023, the Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland (LLR) Violence Reduction Network (VRN) commissioned Rocket Science, an independent research consultancy, to research what effective support for neurodivergent young people in the criminal justice system (CJS) looks like, what support is currently being provided in LLR, and how local CJS partners could improve their support for neurodivergent young people. This report is organised by research methodology, which is described in the section below.

Methodology

This report will answer the following research questions:

- What does effective support look like for those with neurodivergent conditions in the criminal justice system?
- How are the needs of children and young people with neurodivergent conditions currently met when interacting with the police, youth justice, and VRN commissioned services in LLR?
- How could local CJS partners improve support for children and young people with neurodivergent conditions?

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[4] Revolving Doors. (2022). Exploring the Links Between Neurodiversity and the Revolving Door of Crisis and Crime. Link
[5] Day, A.M. (2021). Disabling and Criminalising Systems? Understanding the Experiences and Challenges Facing
Justice Experienced, Neurodiverse Children in the Education and Youth Justice Systems. Link
[6] Violence Reduction Network for LLR (2023) Serious Violence Strategic Needs Assessment. Link
[7] Criminal Justice Joint Inspection. Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System: A Review of the Evidence. Link

To answer the research questions, a three-stage methodology was adopted. First, a rapid evidence review was conducted, which included articles from academic journals, published evidence from CJS actors across the United Kingdom (UK), and other published reports. The purpose of the evidence review is to summarise the evidence that currently exists on good practice for effectively supporting neurodivergent young people in the CJS.

Next, in order to gain an understanding of the situation in LLR, local professionals were invited to take part in an interview or focus group. This received a positive response, with a total of 23 local professionals participating in the research across four focus groups and four interviews. The professionals came from a range of teams across the CJS partners, including police, probation, youth justice, multi-systemic therapy (MST) teams, violence intervention coaches, and other professionals. The focus groups and interviews were conducted between 18th April 2023 and 30th June 2023.

To support the qualitative research, a survey was also distributed to professionals who worked for, or in partnership with, the CJS. The survey was developed to reach a wider audience than the interviews and to gain a deeper understanding of the staff in LLR knowledge and understanding of neurodiversity, and the current adaptions being made to effectively support neurodivergent young people. In total, the survey received 30 responses from practitioners working across the criminal justice, health, education, and other public sectors. Some of the organisations represented in the survey included: Leicestershire Police, Leicestershire County Council, and Leicester City Council.

Rapid evidence review

This evidence review provides a summary of the good practice in support and adaptations for neurodivergent young people in the CJS. It should be noted that some research used in this review focuses specifically on just one neurodiverse condition (e.g., autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Where this is the case, it is highlighted throughout the review.

Neurodiversity through the criminal justice system

Research into the experience of neurodivergent people throughout the CJS has highlighted how they face significant barriers at every stage of their interactions with the CJS. This section briefly outlines some of these barriers, demonstrating why the CJS does not always adequately support neurodivergent young people.

First contact

From their first encounters with police, many behaviours of neurodivergent people, such as differences in communication or slower responses times, may be misinterpreted by the responding police officer.[7] Additionally, these situations are naturally high-stress for all involved, and this is known to increase sensory sensitivities for autistic individuals.[8] Therefore, in scenarios where there are flashing lights and loud noises such as sirens, this can contribute to an incident being escalated, which may lead to the young person being more likely to be arrested and for liaison and diversion services to not be considered.[7] Moreover, actions taken by police officers such as handcuffing, using raised voices, or attempting to restrain an individual may cause further anxiety and distress, especially for autistic young people with sensory difficulties.[9]

The environment

Once in custody, a neurodivergent individual may be furthered disadvantaged by the custody environment. Custody environments are often not welcoming for individuals, especially those with sensory difficulties, as there are many bright lights, noises, smells, and many unfamiliar and new people.[7] Therefore from the first exchanges with CJS professionals, neurodivergent young people are disadvantaged by the routine environment of the CJS. Unlike other situations, young people cannot withdraw from themselves from the CJS environment when they are overstimulated, which may impact on their behaviour.[10] This contributes to the environment of the CJS being described as 'hostile' for neurodivergent individuals.[11] Having an awareness of the ramifications of how the physical environment in which young people find themselves can affect them is important to understanding how CJS environments need to be adapted to better support neurodivergent young people. It is also important to note that while there are certainly reasonable adjustments which can be made to better support neurodivergent individuals, there will be some instances where adjustments cannot be feasibly made. [7]

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[8] Gainsborough, J. and Greaves, K. (2022). Educational Psychology Perspectives on Supporting Young Autistic People. Link
[9] National Autistic Society. (2020). Autism: A Guide for Police Officers and Staff. Link.
[10] Day, A.M. (2022). Disabling and criminalising systems? Understanding the experiences and challenges facing incarcerated, neurodivergent children in the education and youth justice systems in England. Link
[11] Clasby, B. et al. (2022). Responding to neurodiversity in the courtroom: a brief evaluation of environmental accommodations to increase procedural fairness. Link

Procedures and processes

Further, the day-to-day procedures and processes in the CJS can work to disadvantage neurodivergent young people. For example, previous research suggests that communication and comprehension barriers within the CJS also marginalise neurodivergent individuals, as they may be more likely to misunderstand their rights and the allegations against them, and may not fully understand the consequences which arise out of their decisions or testimonies. [12] This can make neurodiverse individuals more likely to make false confessions or plead guilty, be too honest when answering questions, and be more likely to misunderstand the consequences of these actions.[8,13] As a result, this demonstrates how the normal processes in the CJS may disadvantage neurodiverse people if measures are not taken to ensure that they are properly supported. Therefore, it is important that CJS professionals understand the barriers that may be faced by neurodivergent individuals in the CJS and the appropriate actions which can be made to help guarantee that these can be overcome. These barriers in procedures and processes can often be mitigated through adapting communication methods and styles, which is further explored in the following section.

Good practice in supporting neurodivergent young people

Underpinning the effective support of neurodivergent young people is taking a child-first approach, which involves ensuring that practitioners can take an individualised and holistic approach when working with young people.[14] Similarly, it is also been highlighted that many young people may have experienced traumatic-events, and so it is also important to work in a trauma-informed way.[15] These principles of taking a tailored and holistic approach to supporting young people in the CJS are reflected throughout the evidence on good practice.

Knowledge and understanding

The first essential step in being able to support neurodivergent young people effectively in the CJS is to be able to identify which young people need additional or alternative support and know what this support should look like. First, staff should ask the young person if they have been diagnosed with a specific neurodiverse condition, and what reasonable adjustments they may need.[16] Some young people may know what additional support they need and will be upfront about this. Thus, research with neurodivergent individuals in the CJS recommends that staff should directly ask the young people what adaptions or provisions they may need and then make any reasonable adjustments as needed.[17] Moreover, research on good practice highlighted the importance of taking an individual and empathetic

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[12] Hughes, N. et al. (2020). Ensuring the Rights of Children with Neurodevelopmental Disabilities within Child Justice Systems. Link

[13] Magistrates Association. (2020). Neurodiversity: Embracing Inclusivity in the Magistrates' Courts. Link

[14] Day, A.M. (2022). Disabling and Criminalising systems? Understanding the Experiences and Challenges Facing Incarcerated, Neurodivergent Children in the Education and Youth Justice Systems in England. Link

[15] McVilly. (2022). Identifying and Responding to Young People with Cognitive Disability and Neurodiversity in Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand youth justice systems. Link

[16]Dickie, I. et al. (2018) The Criminal Justice System and People on the Autism Spectrum: Perspectives on Awareness and Identification. Link

[17] Criminal Justice Joint Inspection. Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System: A Review of the Evidence. Link

approach to meeting an individual's needs. [13] The Criminal Justice Joint Inspection noted how when CJS staff use compassion and take the time to listen to the needs of individuals, many of their immediate needs can be quickly met.[7]

However, many young people will not be upfront about their diagnosis or may not be aware that they have a neurodiverse condition. For example, research concerning autistic adults in the criminal justice system, found that 37% of them indicated that they did not tell the police that they were autistic when they were arrested.[16] This may have been because they have experienced stigma or bias in the past, or may not believe that their autism diagnosis is relevant information to be shared at their arrest. [16] Additionally, a lot of young people may not know they are neurodiverse before they come into contact with the CJS. This is because their needs may have been missed in educational settings or because of the long waitlists for diagnostic services. [18] Therefore, it is important that CJS staff are not only asking questions to determine if a young person may need additional support, but are also able to identify behaviours and other signs that a young person needs additional support.[17] For this reason, the HM Inspectorate of Probation recommends that staff should not rely on diagnosis, but rather examine the young person's behaviour and also directly ask the young person if they need additional or alternative forms of support. [19]

However, evidence from the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection suggests that across England and Wales those working in prison and probation have low knowledge of the variety of neurodiverse conditions and how these conditions may present in different people. [20] Additionally, in a national survey, just over one-quarter (28%) of those who worked in police or probation reported receiving any training on neurodiversity.[20] This makes consistent training for all CJS practitioners and staff a critical element to effectively supporting neurodivergent individuals in the CJS. Additionally, because neurodiversity encompasses a range of conditions and presentation, an important part of training is understanding this diversity and identifying when someone may need additional adjustments or support. This training should form a fundamental part of the training package for all staff working across criminal justice partners.

Although training is essential to identifying need, due to the diversity of conditions and presentations CJS staff cannot be expected to experts in all areas. However, they should know the signs and presentation of common neurodiverse conditions, such as ASD and ADHD. In addition to increasing awareness around the presentation and signs of neurodiverse conditions, training and awareness events can help dispel misconceptions and negative stereotypes around neurodiversity.[21] Working to raise awareness and dismiss negative stereotypes will help in opening a dialogue around neurodiversity and promote strength-based practices. Moreover, good practice also emphasised that training and awareness-raising events for CJS staff should also incorporate the lived experience of neurodivergent individuals who have been in the criminal justice system. [20] Incorporating this into training events was highly valued by the staff who received it, and suggested that this should be a fundamental feature of training programmes. [20] To summarise, staff with CJS need to be able to quickly identify when a young person may have additional needs, feel comfortable discussing these additional needs with the young person, and understand which alternative provisions or adjustments can be made to better support

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[18] Kenny, E. (2022). Exploring the Youth Court Experience of Children and Young People (CYP) with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND): Implications for Educational Psychology Practice. Link
[19] HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2021). Neurodiversity – a whole child approach for youth justice. Link
[20] Criminal Justice Joint Inspection. Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System: A Review of the Evidence. Link
[21] Young, S. (2018). Identification and Treatment of Offenders with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in the Prison Population: A Practical Approach Based upon Expert Consensus. Link

them. To facilitate this, training and awareness opportunities are crucial to increase knowledge and confront stereotypes.

Awareness of intersectional needs

As part of having a holistic understanding of the needs of a young person, CJS practitioners should also recognise that other factors such as gender, ethnicity, and culture can intersect with neurodiversity, and that these intersections may affect how a young person is marginalised by the CJS. For example, research suggests that people from ethnic minority backgrounds may face more stigma and biases in the criminal justice system. [22] This is especially relevant to LLR, as over one-half of Leicester's population belongs to an ethnic minority group (this figure is much lower in Leicestershire and Rutland).[23] Taking these factors into consideration, will help ensure that CJS practitioners are taking whole-child approach in their work.[22] Similarly, it has been found that young people in the CJS who have a neurodisability have usually experienced more cumulative adversity than a young person in the CJS without a neurodisability.[24] Again emphasising the need for CJS professionals to take a holistic and trauma-informed approach when working with all young people.

Not only will these factors impact their life experiences, but research suggests that they can all also affect how some neurodiverse conditions present in young people.[25] For example, females often exhibit milder signs of ADHD and mostly attentional problems, as opposed to the behavioural and hyperactivity seen in many males. [26] As a result, many females with ADHD may not have been previously identified in educational settings, and so may be less likely to have a diagnosis when they first come into contact with the CJS. [26] Similarly, ASD is also known to present differently in females, as it is thought that girls may be better at masking than males. [26] As a result, it is important that practitioners are knowledgeable about these variations, and are able to identify when an individual may require additional support no matter how a neurodiversity presents in an individual. Research has suggested the screening tools used to identify neuro and cognitive disabilities, may not be culturally sensitive, highlighting the need for further review of these tools. [27] Therefore, CJS staff need to be trained and aware of how gender identity, culture, and ethnicity can impact the presentation and identification of neurodivergent conditions. Understanding the intersectional effects of these factors has been highlighted as crucial to effectively supporting neurodivergent young people in CJS. [28]

Responding to needs

In addition to identifying additional needs, CJS staff must also be equipped to ask the correct questions and have the resources to make any reasonable adjustments as required. To facilitate this, staff need

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[22] National Autistic Society. (2022). "My Life Could be So Different" – Experiences of Autistic Young People in the Youth Justice System. Link
[23] Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland Integrated Care System. A Bright Future for Health, Care, and Wellbeing in Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland. Link
[24] McVilly. (2022). Identifying and Responding to Young People with Cognitive Disability and Neurodiversity in Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand youth justice systems. Link
[25] Dickie, I. et al. (2018). The Criminal Justice System and People on the Autism Spectrum: Perspectives on Awareness and Identification. Link
[26]Kahn. L. (2021). Understanding the Needs and What Works for Girls in the Children and Young People's Secure Estate: Literature Review. Link

[27] McVilly. (2022). Identifying and Responding to Young People with Cognitive Disability and Neurodiversity in Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand youth justice systems. Link
[28] Doell, K.A. (2022). The Use of Youth Justice Services by Young People with Neurodevelopmental Disorders in Glasgow, Scotland: A Qualitative Exploration of the Perspectives of Services Providers. Link

to be able to have the time and resources to identify the needs of a young person and make reasonable adjustments as needed.

There will not be one adjustment or type of additional support which will be able to effectively support all neurodivergent young people in contact with criminal justice system. However, there are several basic and reasonable adjustments which should be convenient for CJS staff to implement. Some of the key additional supports and adjustments which have been identified in the literature on good practice are outlined below.

Communication adjustments and visual aids

Communication between young people and CJS professionals is vital. It is important that all young people are clearly told what is happening, what will happen next, their rights, and the consequences of any decisions they make. Adaptive communication, where a person is able to change the way they communicate based on the needs of another, is crucial to effective communication with neurodivergent young people,[29] whilst failure to make adaptations can act as a barrier. For example, written letters, such as those from CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), have been identified in previous research as a barrier to accessibility for those with low levels of literacy or comprehension. [28] Thus, it is important for staff to reflect on if the communication methods they are using are appropriate for the individual they are working with.

Although the most effective method of communication will be highly dependent on the needs of the particular young person, some of the key principles include ensuring that all communication is simple, clear, direct, and available in visual formats.[30] It should be standard practice to clearly explain to the young people any and all processes, who they will be meeting, and what will happen next.[31] This information should be conveyed both visually and in easy-read formats.[30] Visual flow charts that clearly illustrate processes and potential outcomes, for example, can be useful helping to demonstrate and clearly convey information about a process and the different outcomes that arise from different choices.[30] Additionally, illustrated or graphic timelines depicting the necessary steps a young person must travel through are helpful for a young person to follow their progress through a system.[30] This can be important in custody settings where timelines can be unpredictable due to other priorities.[32] Providing visual tools to show what steps have been completed, and what is left to do, can help provide structure without promising specific timings.

Other areas where pictorial aids have been highlighted in the good practice include body diagrams to assist in interviewing and to demonstrate what will happen if a young person needs to be searched. Similarly, providing photos of what a courtroom will look like and who will be there, plays an important role in ensuring that the young people know what to expect and relieve anxiety about unfamiliar processes.[30] These examples of visual tools have been successfully adapted by other police forces in England. For example, the Nottinghamshire Autism Police Partnership has a toolkit of guidance for staff, an easy-read information booklet on custody, a flowchart of the custody process, body diagrams, a legal rights sheet, and a prompt sheet which summaries the key adjustments custody staff can make to better support autistic individuals.[33] These tools provide resources and information to support

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[29] Dickie, I. et al. (2018) The Criminal Justice System and People on the Autism Spectrum: Perspectives on Awareness and Identification. Link

[30] Clasby, B. et al. (2022). Responding to Neurodiversity in the Courtroom: A Brief Evaluation of Environmental Accommodations to Increase Procedural Fairness. Link

[31] Magistrates Association. (2020). Neurodiversity: Embracing Inclusivity in the Magistrates' Courts. Link

[32] Gainsborough, J. and Greaves, K. (2022). Educational Psychology Perspectives on Supporting Young Autistic People. Link

[33] University of Nottingham. Nottinghamshire Autism Police Partnership. Link

individuals in the custody process and supports the custody staff by having a list of suitable adaptions at their fingertips.

Other suggestions in terms of good practice concern the language used by those working with young people. It is recommended that the use metaphors, jargon, acronyms, or idioms should always be avoided.[31] In particular, it is also recommended to only speak literally and specifically, especially when working with autistic individuals. [34] For example, phrases that could be taken literally, such as *"We will be done in a minute,"* may create confusion and anxiety if not realised. [35]

Ensuring that all communication is simple and clear is especially important in the CJS, where a lot of words or terms may be unfamiliar to a young person. It is also good practice to ask young people one question at a time, give ample thinking time, and provide frequent breaks. [36] By doing so, this can help young people process the information and help them from getting overwhelmed as they encounter a lot of new information and unfamiliar people. The National Autistic Society guidance for police officers includes advice on not expecting a young person to make eye contact, not using a raised voice unless necessary, and always using the name of the young person so they know that they are the one being spoken to.[35]

Consideration must be given to the suitability of the methods of communication in all interactions with young people. This can extend to the ways in which police and CJS practitioners' question or interview neurodivergent young people. Research conducted on the experience of autistic people in the criminal justice system highlighted how traditional interviewing techniques, that use open-ended structures, may not be the most appropriate for autistic individuals. [37] Research conducted with autistic people found that an interviewing technique called 'witness-aimed first account' may be more useful in interviews. [37] This technique involves having the person being interviewed creating different boxes that relate to the event, and then having a free-recall that is guided by the interviewer, on the topic of each box.[37] Although this is just one example described in the literature, it exemplifies how every aspect of communication, questioning and interactions needs to be examined to see if it is offering the most effective support to the young people within the boundaries of reasonable adjustments.

Ensuring understanding

Because those interacting with the CJS will often be overwhelmed with the amount of information that is presented to them, it is important to ensure that professionals continually check the understanding of those they are working with. [38] To help facilitate this, it is essential to consider if the young person has accurately understood what has been communicated to them, and make sure that they are not simply agreeing. For example, staff should not ask a young person questions like: *"Do you understand what I just told you?"* This is because these types of questions might lead to agreeing with the question so that they can move on. [38] Instead, questions such as *"Could you please tell me what you understood from what I just said?"* are more effective in ascertaining whether or not the young person has accurately comprehended the information they have been given.[38] These simple adjustments can help staff and young people ensure that they both have a common understanding. It's also good practice for

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[34] Gainsborough, J. and Greaves, K. (2022). Educational Psychology Perspectives on Supporting Young Autistic People. Link
[35] National Autistic Society. (2020). Autism: A Guide for Police Officers and Staff. Link.
[36] Magistrates Association. (2020). Neurodiversity: Embracing Inclusivity in the Magistrates' Courts. Link
[37] Gainsborough, J. and Greaves, K. (2022). Educational Psychology Perspectives on Supporting Young Autistic People. Link
[38] Clasby, B. et al. (2022). Responding to Neurodiversity in the Courtroom: A Brief Evaluation of Environmental Accommodations to Increase Procedural Fairness. Link

all information that needs to be communicated being accompanied by a summary document, so that individuals can refer to this later if needed, instead of relying on memory.[38]

Environmental adjustments

Many neurodivergent individuals also experience sensory difficulties and are typically able to leave an environment if it is overwhelming. However, a young person cannot remove themselves from most interactions with the criminal justice system[39] and as a result, there are several reasonable adaptions which should be made to better support those with sensory difficulties. Some of these are adjustments include:

- Lighting - Reduce levels or light or use dimmable light bulbs to allow levels of light to be adjustable. [38] Having eye masks available may also help with light sensitivities. [40]
- Noise - Have quieter or more private spaces available and offering ear plugs or ear defenders.[40]
- Smell - Try to make sure that there all no strong scents from perfume, cleaning materials, or other odours.[41]
- Furniture - Avoid clutter, paint rooms in calming colours, use soft furnishing where possible, or have weighted blankets and stress balls have been identified as measures to help reduce anxiety.[38,40]
- Physical contact - Especially when working with autistic young people, physical contact should be kept to a minimum. For example, CJS professionals should not, as far as possible, restrain, handcuff, or try and stop a young person from making repetitive movements which may be a calming mechanism.[42]

These small changes can easily be made to most environments that a young person may encounter through the CJS, and these will help reduce stimulus and anxiety. [43] Although it must be acknowledged that there are many changes that cannot be reasonably made, explicit consideration of these within risk assessments in conjunction with healthcare providers, could play a crucial role in supporting individuals with sensory sensitivities while they are in the CJS.

Knowledge and information sharing

One of the key barriers in the CJS which makes it difficult to effectively support neurodivergent young people is information and knowledge sharing systems. This includes difficulties in transferring knowledge between and within CJS partners, which is crucial to having consistent support for neurodivergent young people as they move through the system. This information should include if a young person has a diagnosis, if they require any adjustments or additional support to engage in

[39] Day, A.M. (2022). Disabling and criminalising systems? Understanding the Experiences and Challenges Facing Incarcerated, Neurodivergent Children in the Education and Youth Justice Systems in England. Link
[40] Criminal Justice Joint Inspection. Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System: A Review of the Evidence. Link
[41] University of Bath. 10 STEPS to Creating a Neurodiverse Inclusive Environment. Link
[42] National Autistic Society. (2020). Autism: A Guide for Police Officers and Staff. Link
[43] Criminal Justice Joint Inspection. Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System: A Review of the Evidence. Link

services, and anything staff have found that works in supporting that particular young person.[44] When this information is not shared, or is not able to be shared, CJS staff will not be able to provide that support that a young person needs as they enter their care. To illustrate, within CJS partners, this could include ensuring that if a young person has identified needs, that this information travels with them and is communicated to each professional that engages with them, including solicitors and court professionals.[45] Additionally, barriers in information sharing were also described between education and the CJS with the sharing of special education status schools often not being done in a timely manner.[45] This makes it more difficult for the appropriate support to be in place from the outset. As a result, information concerning the additional needs of young people should be communicated between CJS professionals through the system in order to ensure that they can be effectively supported.

Conclusions from the evidence review

This rapid evidence review has outlined the research on how CJS professionals can effectively support neurodivergent young people who are in contact with the CJS. There are several key conclusions from the review of good practice:

- Regular training is essential to ensure that CJS professionals have knowledge and understanding of neurodiversity. This will help staff not only identify when a young person may have additional needs but can also help dispel stereotypes and biases around neurodiversity. Wherever possible these trainings should incorporate the voice of those with lived experience.
- Staff should understand how one's culture, gender, and ethnicity can impact the presentation of neurodiverse conditions and their experiences in the CJS.
- Staff should routinely ask all individuals about their needs and respond to these wherever possible. If a person is not able to communicate their needs, staff should be trained to identify the signs that someone may need alternative or additional support.
- All communication with the young person and their family should be done in a way that meets their needs. This could include providing easy-read formats, visual summaries, and reading all documentation out loud. These visual and easy-read resources need to be available for all information, including any procedures or individuals that will be encountered, and this should be easily accessible by CJS professionals.
- Staff should always check the young person's understanding of what information has been communicated with them. This should be done in a manner where the staff are clear that the young person has a clear and correct understanding of the information and should not be conducted as a 'tick-box' exercise.

[44] National Autistic Society. (2022). "My Life Could be So Different" – Experiences of Autistic Young People in the Youth Justice System. Link
[45] Kenny, E. (2022). Exploring the Youth Court Experience of Children and Young People (CYP) with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND): Implications for Educational Psychology Practice. Link

- Adaptations to the physical environment should be made, where possible, to fit the sensory needs of the young person. This should include having a quiet space for the young person to go to, dimming lights, and providing ear defenders or comfort items where appropriate.
- To support staff in remembering what adjustments can be made, having a quick summary document or catalogue of all available additional supports, is useful in supporting staff to put them in place as soon as they are identified.
- If a young person has an identified need, this should be clearly communicated to all CJS professionals they interact with, so that there are not gaps in support.

Qualitative research and survey findings

Qualitative fieldwork was conducted to gather further evidence on the current knowledge and awareness about neurodiversity among practitioners, what effective support is already in place, and what practitioners would like to see changed in order to effectively support neurodivergent young people. Practitioners from key CJS partners LLR were invited to participate in either a focus group or individual interview for the research. In total, 23 staff participated across four focus groups and four interviews.

In addition, a survey was sent to CJS professionals across LLR, and this received 30 responses between 12 April to 31 May 2023. Of the 30 respondents, over half of respondents (n=18) reported that they worked in the criminal justice sector. Five respondents said that they worked in other public sector services, one respondent worked primarily in the health sector, and one respondent worked primarily in the education sector. Five respondents said they worked in another sector.

The findings from both the survey and the interviews and focus groups are thematically summarised below.

Knowledge and understanding of neurodiversity

Survey respondents were asked if their organisation has a definition of neurodiversity, and any specific policies or procedures around the inclusion or support of neurodivergent young people. In regard to both aspects, the majority of respondents were unsure. The results are summarised in the chart below (Figure 1). Among the 9 respondents who indicated that they have specific policies or procedures (beyond minimum legal requirements) for the inclusion of neurodivergent young people, the majority (n=7) worked in the criminal justice sector, and the other two respondents worked in the health and education sectors.

	Definition of neurodiversity	Specific policies or procedures on inclusion
Yes	5	9
Unsure	17	15
No	8	6

Figure 1 - Definition and policies on neurodiversity within respondent's organisation

Next, respondents were asked about the understanding of neurodiversity in their organisation as a whole. An equal proportion of respondents indicated that most (n=11) or some (n=11) have an understanding of neurodiversity in their organisation. 2 respondents believed that everyone in their organisation had a thorough understanding of neurodiversity. In comparison, 2 respondents also believed that neurodiversity is not well understood across their organisation. This shows that across organisations there is some knowledge about neurodiversity, however it is mixed.

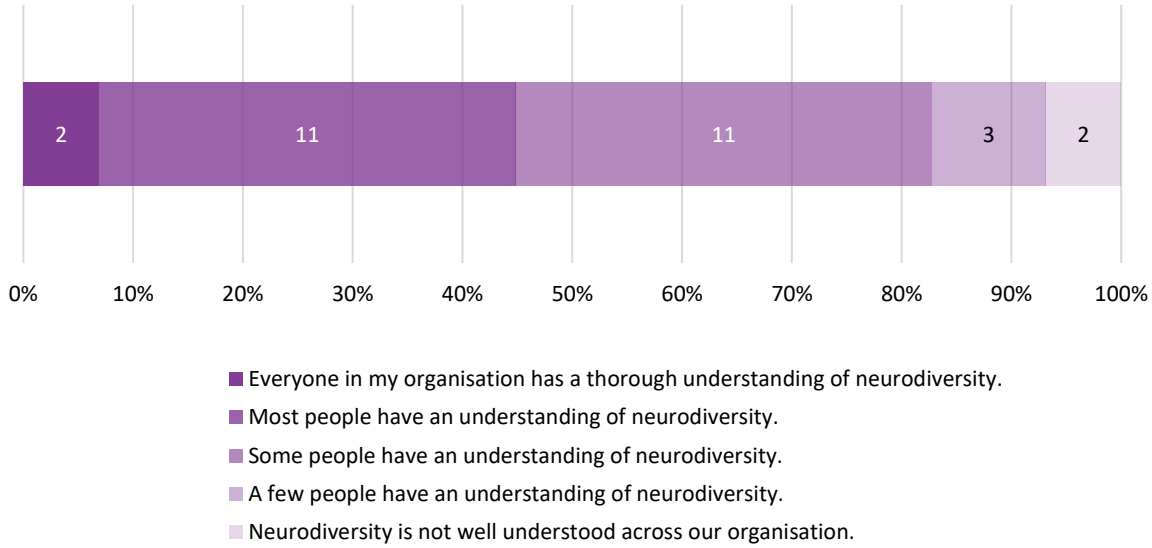

Figure 2 - Organisation's current understanding of neurodiversity

Similarly, participants in the focus groups and interviews were asked about their personal knowledge of neurodiversity and their perceptions of the wider knowledge of neurodiversity across CJS partners in LLR. For the most part, practitioners felt that they had a good understanding of neurodiversity, but that there was significant room for additional training and continuous learning as this knowledge was not consistent throughout CJS partners.

On one hand, some practitioners felt that they had limited knowledge of neurodiversity, with one staff member remembering that they "had to Google it." Some of the participants, especially in probation and police, highlighted that this topic was not covered in their training. Similarly, most participants felt that the training on the subject was inconsistent and has not been frequently offered to some teams since before the Covid-19 pandemic. Across the CJS partners, practitioners reflected that accessing training was dependent on their team manager organising it, or staff searching out opportunities on their own initiative. For example, some participants indicated that they were able to access training and had done an Autism Awareness course they had found themselves.

"Nowhere near enough training to deal with people with neurodiversity." - Practitioner

Training is reliant on the people leading on it putting it on top of the agenda." - Practitioner

One the other hand, some participants felt that they had a good knowledge of neurodiversity and that they received regular training on this subject. The MST teams and custody teams felt that they had a good understanding of neurodiversity, and that they received adequate training. For example, the MST team receive quarterly training sessions, which have included training on neurodiversity. Practitioners who described themselves as having a good knowledge of neurodiversity also believed that they could accurately identify young people who may have additional support needs and felt comfortable to make any needed adjustments. They identified how their knowledge came from spending a lot of time with young people and their families, which helped them become familiar with their individual needs. Practitioners also highlighted that working closely with educational psychologists and other professionals had helped increase their own knowledge of neurodiversity.

"You're not qualified to diagnose, but there is always a sense. You can look at what the child needs and support them in that way." - Practitioner

These differences in the amount of training completed by staff were also seen in the survey results. Amongst those surveyed, only one-half of the respondents (n=15) had received training on neurodiversity. 3 respondents were not sure if they had received training and 12 respondents had not received any training.

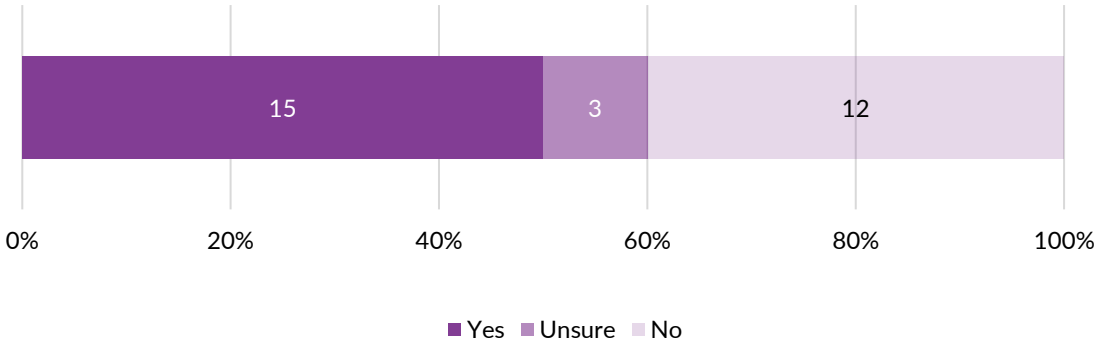

Figure 3 - Have you received training on neurodiversity?

For the survey respondents who had received training, these sessions mostly covered ASD and ADHD. However, the regularity and depth of the training varied significantly. For example, some respondents noted that they have had only basic training, whereas others had received accreditation in these areas. Similarly, while some noted that the last relevant training they had received was before the Covid-19 pandemic, others reported that they received training up to every 2-3 months. These findings highlight the significant differences across teams and CJS partners in terms of the training and knowledge surrounding neurodiversity.

During the qualitative fieldwork, a few of the participants also reflected that they believed the overall knowledge of neurodiversity across CJS partners has seen a notable increase over the last two to three years. This was likened to the increased knowledge around trauma-informed practices and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in recent years, as the practitioners highlighted the links to taking an individualised approach and these topics being more 'popular' in training.

Most participants felt that they had more knowledge of some neurodiverse conditions than others. Notably, ADHD and ASD were identified by staff as the conditions that they saw the most frequently and were thus more familiar with them. However, other staff highlighted that although they were familiar with these conditions, they did not have a good knowledge of the range within neurodiversity and how this can present.

Overall, there are opportunities for training and an awareness about neurodiversity, as a good knowledge of neurodiversity is not consistent across all CJS partners. Several factors contributed to this difference, including team resources and training, the personal knowledge and motivation of the individual, and the availability of training. A comprehensive training needs analysis across all LLR CJS partners would be helpful to map out which teams are covering what topics. The gaps in training provision identified in the needs analysis could then provide objectives for future training programmes.

Experience and outcomes for neurodivergent young people in the CJS

In the survey, respondents were asked if, in their experience, they thought that neurodivergent young people had different experiences or outcomes compared to their neurotypical peers. Almost all the respondents (n=26) believed that neurodivergent young people are more likely to come into contact

with the CJS than other young people. 2 respondents believed neurodivergent and neurotypical young people are equally likely to come into contact with the CJS. The figure below (Figure 4) illustrates the views of those surveyed regarding the experiences and outcomes of neurodivergent young people in the CJS.

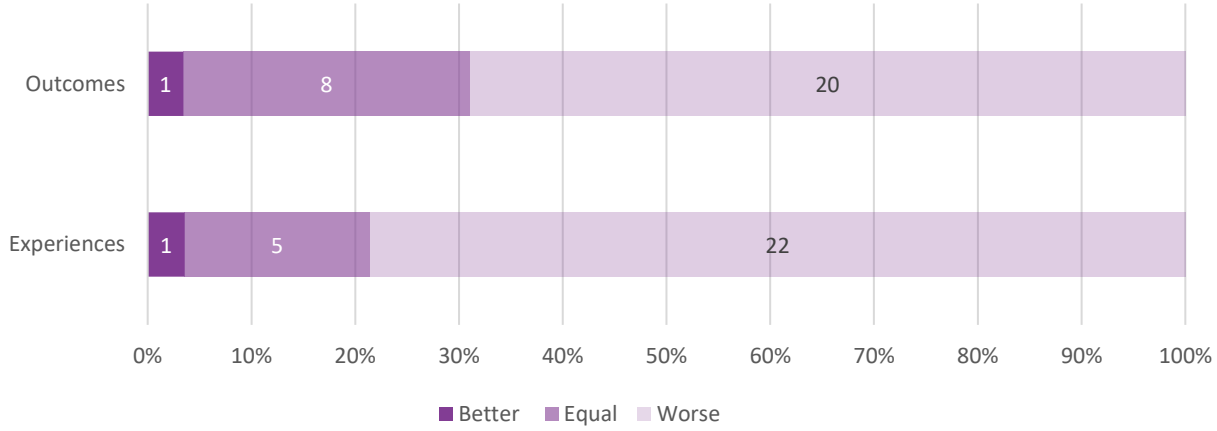

Figure 4 - Experiences and outcomes of neurodivergent compared neurotypical young people in the CJS

A large majority of respondents believed that neurodivergent young people have worse experiences (n=22) and worse outcomes (n=20) than their neurotypical peers in the criminal justice system. However, 5 of those who responded indicated that neurotypical and neurodivergent young people have the same experience in the CJS, and 1 respondent believed that they have a better experience. Similarly, 8 respondents believed that neurodivergent and neurotypical young people have equal outcomes in the criminal justice system and 1 respondent indicated that neurodivergent young people have better outcomes.

On the whole, the professionals participating in the qualitative research reaffirmed that, in their experience, neurodivergent young people were more likely to come into contact with the CJS. Interestingly, one staff member also expressed how some neurodivergent young people that were seen in custody, had previously been unknown to the CJS or other services, and then were in custody for the first time for very serious offences.

"The system as a whole fails anyone who is neurodiverse." - Practitioner

In terms of the outcomes experienced by neurodivergent young people, in comparison to their neurotypical peers, the views of the participants from the interviews and focus groups were more mixed. Some staff expressed that neurodivergent young people were more likely to face challenges within the CJS. For example, some felt that the probation offer was not flexible or responsive to the needs of neurodivergent young people. Unpaid work obligations were felt to set unreasonable expectations because of the strict rules and timelines that must be followed. Some of the professionals reflected that these may be difficult for a neurodivergent young person to remember and adhere to, especially if they have not recently been in mainstream school and are not used to having to follow strict schedules for long periods of time.

"Unpaid work is one size fits all... We are setting people up to fail." - Practitioner

On the other hand, some staff believed the outcomes for neurodivergent young people used to be different, but are now more equal due to the individualised support and adaptions that can be made. One professional also noted a change in their own personal knowledge, indicating that they are now more aware of specific conditions and support that should be in place, that they previously would have been unaware of. It was felt that the continuous assessment, and the ability of panels to use the

assessments when making referral orders, creates a greater equity in outcomes. Solicitors also being more aware of neurodiversity has also helped to improve outcomes for neurodivergent people.

Organisation-wide support for neurodivergent young people

Similarly, survey respondents were also asked about their organisation's overall position in relation to supporting neurodivergent young people. The majority of respondents (n=17) agreed that there were some key staff within their organisation who were knowledgeable about neurodiversity, but there currently is no organisation-wide policy or practice of inclusive support. Only 2 respondents selected the statement: *"All staff have been trained on neurodiversity and inclusive support for neurodiverse young people, and this is seen in policy and practice."*

It is important to note that no survey respondents believed that their organisation had not started to develop inclusive practices for working with neurodivergent young people, and all respondents agreed that this was relevant to their organisation.

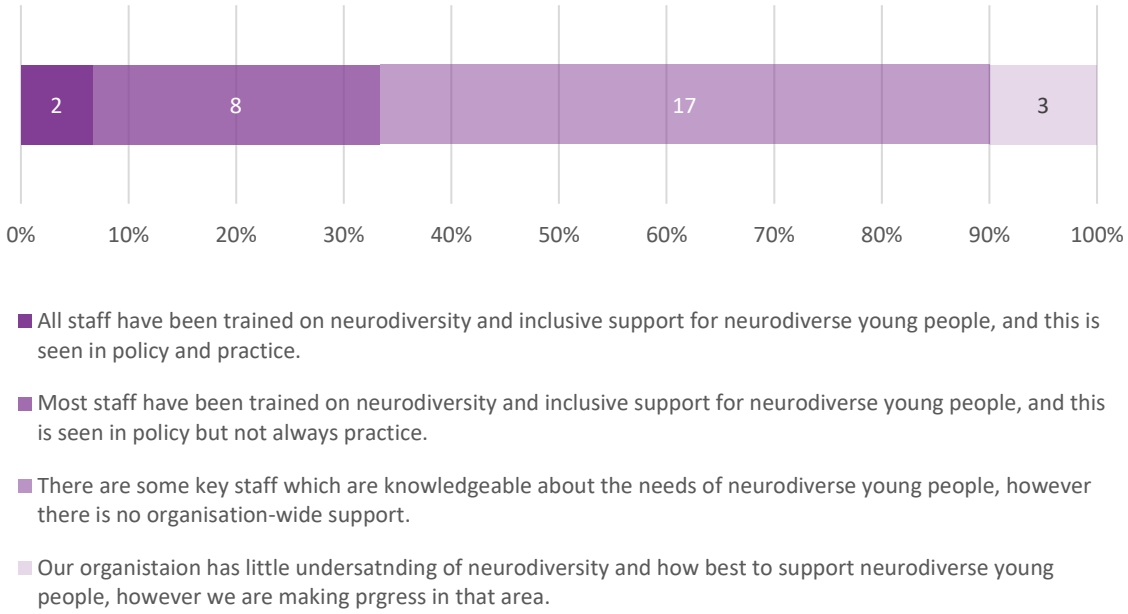

Figure 5 - Organisation's current position in supporting neurodivergent young people

Support for neurodivergent young people across the CJS

Respondents were asked how often the needs of neurodivergent young people across CJS partners in LLR were being met. It is interesting to note that responses concerning the CJS across LLR were less positive than those of the respondent's organisation, indicating that on the whole, respondents believed their organisation was more supportive of neurodivergent young people than CJS partners. Although no respondents believed that these needs were 'never being met,' no respondents indicated that the young people's needs were always met across the CJS partners.

Just less than one-half (n=14) of respondents believed that CJS partners in LLR sometimes met the needs of neurodivergent young people. The next most common response was that these needs are rarely met. This accounted for just less than one-third of responses (n=9).

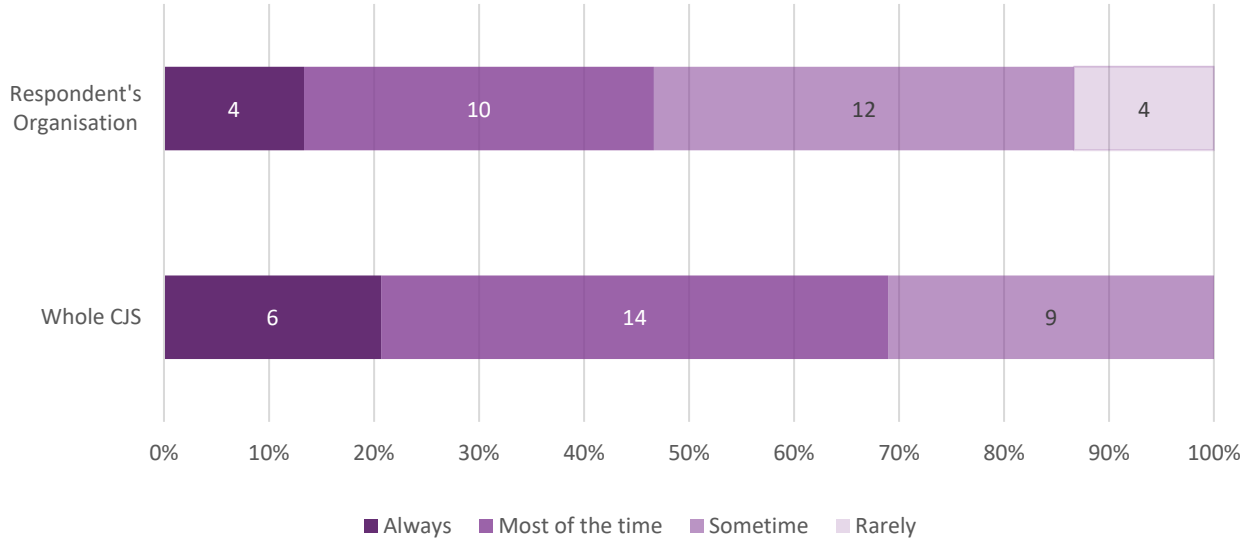

Figure 6 - Support for neurodivergent young person in the respondent's organisation compared to the whole of the CJS

Respondents were allowed to provide an explanation for their responses. From the respondents who felt that CJS was often able to provide effective support, they highlighted that joined up working and consideration of these throughout the entire process played an important role in effectively supporting neurodivergent young people.

"I haven't worked with all other services but from joined up working, young people are extremely well supported." – Survey respondent

"It's [neurodiversity] taken into consideration from the offset, from the first initial meeting, assessment, through to intervention."- Survey respondent

However, many respondents were less positive about the support that was currently being offered by CJS partners. Some of the common reasons behind these gaps in effective support identified by the respondents included a lack of knowledge and awareness, a lack of resources, and the barriers posed by more systemic features of the CJS. For example, the long wait lists to be diagnosis and other support services were identified as a barrier. Some examples of these responses are provided below:

"I believe there is a lot of staff that do not have the knowledge to apply to young people with neurodiverse needs, and therefore are unaware that they are not fulfilling the needs of these young people." – Survey respondent

"It depends on the professionals around them, some have better knowledge and understanding than others. The system is not inclusive so the workers are limited sometimes in what they can do."- Survey respondent

Survey respondents were asked if they believed if the staff of CJS partners have the resources, capacity, and capabilities to effectively support neurodivergent young people. Their answers are visualised below (Figure 7).

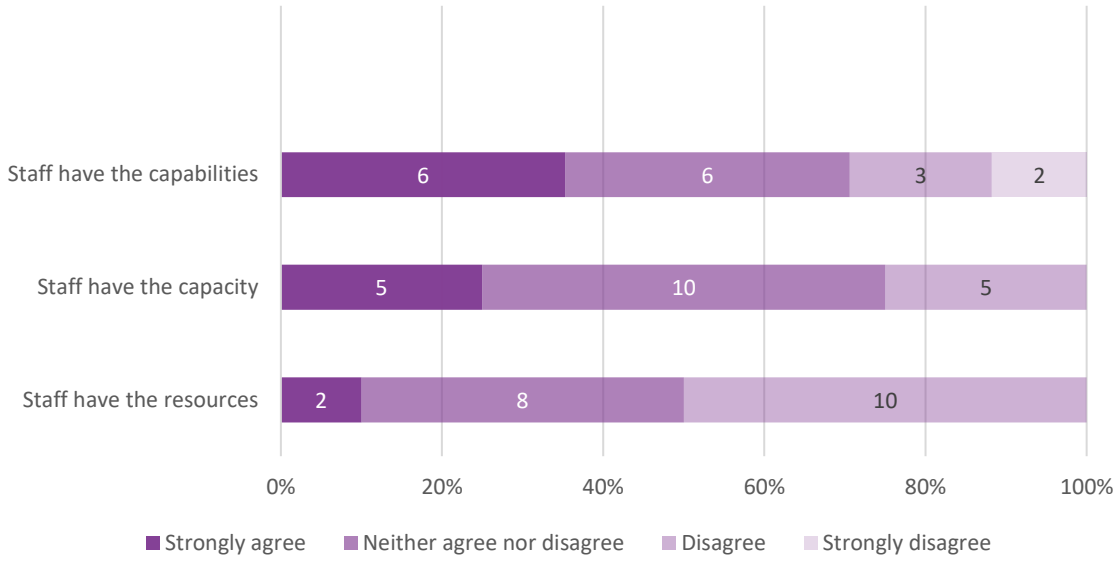

Figure 7- Capacity, capabilities, and resources of staff of CJS partners to understand and support neurodivergent young people

Only 2 respondents strongly agreed that the staff of CJS partners had the resources to understand and support neurodivergent young people. Just under one-third of the respondents (n=9) agreed that they have the resources to provide this support. 8 respondents were neutral. However, one-third (n=10) of respondents disagreed that staff had the resources to support neurodivergent young people.

In comparison, almost one half (n=14) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that staff have the capacity to understand and support neurodivergent young people. However, one-third of respondents (n=10) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. 5 respondents believed that staff do not have the capacity to understand or support neurodivergent young people.

More positive results were seen in relation to staff capabilities. The majority (n=18) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that staff have the capabilities to provide effective support. 6 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that the staff of CJS partners have the ability to provide this support. However, 5 respondents disagreed (n=3) or strongly disagreed (n=2) that staff have the capabilities to understand and support neurodivergent young people.

The findings from the qualitative research concerning areas where current adaptions are effectively meeting the needs of young people, and areas where the support can be improved, are explained in more detail in the following sections.

Current adaptions and provisions being made

Next, interview and focus group participants and survey respondents were asked, what, if any adaptions or provisions were currently being made to support young people they believed may be neurodivergent. These additional supports and adaptions from across the CJS are summarised in the sections below.

Identifying and supporting additional needs

Similar to the generally high levels of awareness and knowledge about neurodiversity, many professionals felt that they were confident in being able to identify when a young person might have additional needs, and that this was an area where they were successful. CJS professionals acknowledged that they were able to identify additional needs both through the risk assessment, health screening tools, and their own identification of behaviours.

"If we don't pick up cues with what they need help with – we pick it up in the risk assessment. We ask questions about neurodiversity... I think we can still pick it up during the assessment even if they don't have a diagnosis." - Practitioner

"There are series of catch net moments, as they go though the CJS they will start to open up, or staff will realise their needs."- Practitioner

Practitioners described how, although they ask about any diagnoses or suspected conditions, they also observe any behaviours and are comfortable identifying when a young person may have additional needs. However, some practitioners did highlight that identification is dependent upon particular practitioners and therefore there are inconsistencies in practice.

"Needs may not immediately be identified if there is something there, but they are not quite sure. It depends on who they come across and if they can identify it." - Practitioner

However, many of the professionals interviewed believed that no matter whether the young person they were working with had a diagnosis or reported additional needs, they were able to take an individual approach. Some practitioners described how they always ask a young person what support they need, and if this can be implemented, they do it. Being flexible and adapting practice to fit the needs of an individual was highlighted by the professionals as the main way in which they believed they were able to effectively support neurodivergent young people. A few CJS professionals linked this individualised and mindful approach to working in a trauma-informed way. Nonetheless, it was acknowledged by many of those interviewed that taking a personalised approach with each young person is not always possible due to the demands on their time and resources.

"We are good at adapting ourselves to the person who is in front of us."- Practitioner

The survey respondents were given a free-text box to be able to describe what their organisation is currently doing to support neurodivergent young people. Many of the responses also centred on the themes of screening young people, tailoring services to the needs of the individual, referring on to specialist services. Some examples of the responses are provided below:

"At initial assessment there are questions regarding any neurodiversity concerns that the client may have, adjustments in service delivery will then be made in regards to method, mode and means, working within the comfort level of the client in the way that suits them best increases engagement." – Survey respondent

"We complete referrals to support services such as ADHD Solutions to support with diagnosis and general aid...We tailor our work around client's needs (client-centred care) to ensure we are support the young person to the best of our ability whether that be around education/employment, housing, finances, sports provisions, sexual health, substance use etc." – Survey respondent

Communication

One of the principal areas where adaptions are currently being made by CJS partners in LLR is in terms of methods and language being used to communicate with young people. A key example of additional support for communication came from the police and custody staff. They described how they have a custody leaflet which explains the out of court process and any questions the young person may have. This leaflet is dyslexia-friendly and printed on coloured paper. Those interviewed felt that this was a useful tool that worked will in a post-incident setting, as the information could be left with the young person. Similarly, practitioners identified that there was an easy-read version of the rights and entitlements booklet, which provided all the essential information in simplified form. Other adaptions that staff reported making including reading out information to a young person, ensuring to explain

information in simpler terms, and slowing down interactions. However, it was also noted by practitioners that not all information that is necessary to be communicated to a young person is available in these easy-read or visual formats.

In addition, several CJS professionals across different teams expressed how they adapt their engagement or intervention based on the needs of the young person before them. For example, they will adapt an intervention by using cue cards, playing sports, or doing activities like cooking to engage with the young person. Finding alternative ways to engage the young person based on their interests was reported by the CJS professionals to be an effective way to create a dialogue with the young people.

"Some practitioners are amazing, with every intervention well thought out to address communication and special interest needs, but it is up to the practitioner to adapt."- Practitioner

In addition, staff from the MST team described how when working with families, the communication preferences of the whole family are accounted for, and how often these additional needs can be missed by social workers for years, as they do not have the time or resources. They detailed how they have developed a catalogue of visual aids to use to effectively communicate when written instructions are not suitable.

Professionals across CJS partners described how they adjust their words and communication style to fit the needs of the young person. Several staff highlighted that they are conscious of not using jargon and acronyms, and that try always try and speak in clear and simple terms. Additionally, other practitioners reported that they always ask the young person if they have understood the information given to them, making sure the information is broken down into smaller chunks, and read aloud it if needed. Another method the interview participants described as being useful in supporting neurodivergent young people was making sure to ask the young person directly, and early on, how they prefer to be communicated with and what potential adaptions should be made.

Physical environment adaptions

The custody setting was the main area identified as having made several major changes in the physical environment to better support neurodivergent young people were made. For example, many of the professionals highlighted the calming room that is available, which includes soft chairs, and which offers a quieter environment where a young person can go to. In addition, practitioners described how there are tools available such as ear defenders, bouncy balls, and foam footballs. The practitioners also explained other methods through which they try and accommodate the sensory needs of neurodivergent young people, including trying to make sure they are in quieter cells, and walk them through custody suite during quieter times and along less busy routes if possible.

"Custody system is brilliant. I can't praise it enough." - Practitioner

Approach of staff

Additionally, some of the professionals highlighted how the overall approach to supporting neurodivergent young people they believe is working well. Identified by one staff member were the tenants from the Educational Endowment Foundation of assessing need, trialling an approach, and then re-evaluating and adjusting as needed. They felt that their service tries to follow this approach and that this helps them meet the needs of neurodivergent young people, while also acknowledging that there is always room for improvement.

"All children in all systems with benefit from neurodiverse adaptations. It is a more trauma informed and caring way of practicing." - Practitioner

Several participants identified that they hoped to keep improving their practice until it was embedded in policy and practice. Staff identified several characteristics which they believed were important to effectively support neurodivergent young people. These included being tenacious, adaptable, having the courage to ask questions, and patience.

Gaps and areas of improvement

This section will outline the area where the CJS professionals felt like there are gaps in terms of effective support for neurodivergent young people. Participants were also asked what, if anything, they believed, should be done to address these gaps. These areas of improvement and relevant suggestions have been thematically summarised below.

Training and knowledge sharing

Many of the participants in the research felt that knowledge and awareness of neurodiversity in the CJS was a key barrier to effectively supporting neurodivergent young people. This was also seen in the survey, were only 60% of respondents agreed that staff had the capabilities to support neurodivergent young people and less than one-half of the survey respondents had received training on neurodiversity.

In the qualitative fieldwork, professionals felt that some staff, especially frontline officers and practitioners, needed to receive more training to increase their knowledge and awareness of neurodiversity. Although the professionals noted training should be tailored the staff's role, it should include some consistent themes such as how to recognise and identify when a young person has additional needs, but also effective communication, and behaviour management methods. Crucially, some professionals also identified the importance of including the voice of those with lived experience in staff training, as this would help CJS staff understand how a neurodivergent young person may experience the CJS. The participants also highlighted that a gap in their knowledge concerning neurodiversity also came from the fact that it is a rapidly evolving topic, and combined with other demands for their time, they cannot stay on top of recent research and developments in this area.

"Last time we did ADHD training was 5 years ago." - Practitioner

Additionally, it was recognised that CJS professionals across all levels, especially senior staff involved in designing programmes and interventions, need to have an understanding of neurodiversity, as this will help lead to wider systematic change. This increased knowledge across all CJS partners and professionals would help encourage a culture shift around people's understanding and misconceptions about neurodiversity.

"People developing systems don't have a wider knowledge of neurodiversity... I really believe if we could change the pathways and systems, the outcomes for those neurodivergent young people would be massively different."- Practitioner

"Knowledge is power and if I've got the knowledge, I can adapt it... You need to have the confidence to adapt what you are doing." - Practitioner

Finally, those answering the survey were asked to reflect on where they believed the biggest gaps lay in terms of effective support, and what, if anything, should be done to improve the current practices. One of the primary gaps identified by respondents was around training and identification of needs in young people. This was reflected in the suggestions for improvement, where many respondents indicated that they would like to see more training across CJS partners. A few respondents also highlighted how this training should include guest speakers and be informed by those with lived experience.

"Training, most people are not aware of the impacts that having a neurodiverse condition can have on ability to interact appropriately with the criminal justice system." - Survey respondent

"Additional funding and resources backed up by training that is rooted in grassroots delivery reality."- Survey respondent

Additionally, during the qualitative fieldwork, several participants identified that there is a lot of knowledge already spread across the CJS partners, but currently there are not enough opportunities to share learning or experiences of good practice. One staff member highlighted how the CJS partners, including staff, CAMHS, psychologists, and ADHD Solutions, contain a depth and breadth of knowledge but they have been underutilised in terms of training other professionals. Some participants highlighted that opportunities to come together with other practitioners, would help facilitate the sharing of learning and best practice and create a dialogue around neurodiversity among CJS partners.

"We've got the experts, but we don't use them."- Practitioner

Knowledge and awareness of young people and families

Alongside increasing staff knowledge, some individuals identified that more should be done to support the young people and their families to understand their neurodiverse condition and the potential implications. It was felt that some young people had simply been handed a diagnosis with no additional support for them or their families. For example, some of the practitioners described how some young people and their families were not aware of what support they were entitled to, or how their condition could potentially impact their behaviour. CJS professionals believed that if young people and their families had a better understanding of neurodiversity, this would allow the staff to be able to better support them and make any required adjustments.

"For the young person and their family, even after diagnosis they don't get much support to understand what it means for them as a family and the young person. I've spent a lot of time explaining what it is."- Practitioner

In the interviews and focus groups, the participants also commented how they often find that neurodiverse conditions are prevalent not only with the young person they are working with, but also their family members, meaning that this knowledge and awareness of neurodiversity may also help the wider family. Finally, one practitioner highlighted how they believed more should be done to increase young people's knowledge about the interaction between pharmaceuticals and illicit drugs. For example, how ADHD medications can interact with cannabis, as some young people with unmanaged ADHD have been known to try and self-medicate with illicit stimulant drugs.

Resources and time

The survey asked respondents how often they felt that their organisation was able to effectively support neurodivergent young people with their current budgets and resources. These responses are visualised below (Figure 8).

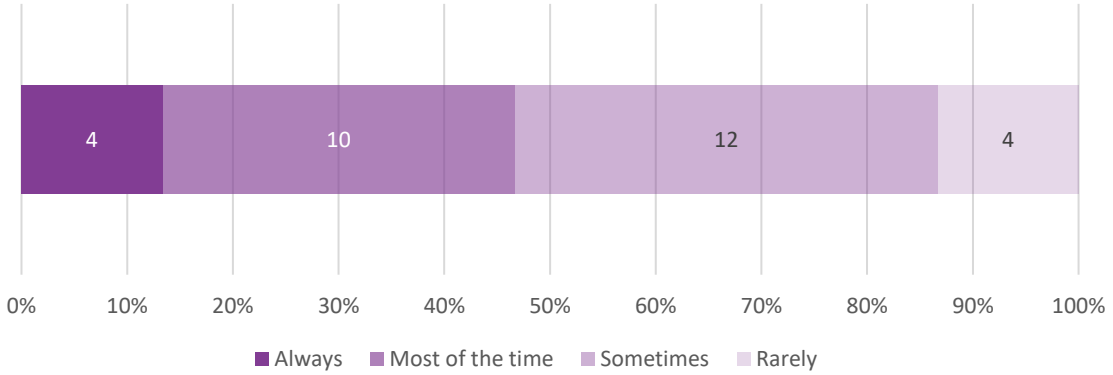

Figure 8 - How often do you feel that your organisation is able to effectively support neurodivergent young people with current budgets/ resources?

One-third of respondents (n=10) believed that with their current budget/resources, they were able to effectively support neurodivergent young people most of the time. The most common response (n=12) was that the organisation was able to support these young people some of the time. This was also the most common response among survey respondents who worked in the criminal justice sector (n=8). An equal number of respondents believed that their organisation always (n=4) and rarely (n=4) able to offer effective support. No respondent indicated that their organisation never was able to effectively support these young people.

Respondents were also given a text box to explain their answers. Among the respondents who were more positive about the support, they highlighted the importance of having the resources to be flexible, adapt to individual needs, and having enough funding to do so. Several respondents also highlighted the importance of working with other organisations such as CAMHs.

"Suitable resources are readily available as is support from other organisations with similar aims and objectives." - Survey respondent

"Our provision is flexible and can be adapted to suit individual needs. We also have additional capacity to support individuals on a 1:1 basis where this is helpful." - Survey respondent

On the other hand, respondents who did not believe they were able to offer effective support as often explained how this was due to a lack of staff knowledge, time, and budget. Even when respondents knew support was available to staff, it was not easily accessible.

"There is some levels of support available within the organisation and provided by the organisation, however often I feel that people have to go to lengths to seek this support rather than being offered... I feel there is much work to do within the organisation to make this support more readily available and increase an understanding of neurodiverse people." – Survey respondent

"Unsure of what support/resources our organisation has to support children that are neurodiverse."- Survey respondent

"Workloads are high... so unless you have knowledge it is easily overlooked." – Survey respondent

When asked what could be done to improve the support for neurodivergent young people in the CJS, most of the survey respondents also indicated that there was a need for increased resources for all CJS partners. For example, a few respondents indicated that they would like to see more specialist trained staff that would be available to work with the young people and who staff could contact with questions.

During the qualitative research, time and resources were also identified as a major barrier to being able to effectively support neurodivergent young people. Some teams described how they faced too many

demands, which made them feel as if they were not able to dedicate enough time and resources to working with each individual young person. They highlighted how they may need to spend additional time building a relationship and working with neurodivergent young people, which creates an additional demand for their time. While some teams were designed to have the resources to work in this intensive and individualised way, these resources are not consistent across CJS partners. Therefore, the time and resources of staff have been seen as a gap to being able to consistently provide effective support for neurodivergent young people.

"Operationally the demands are so significant. It is difficult to practice in an impactful way."- Practitioner

In terms of resources, one CJS professional explained how having resources or experts readily available who they could contact for advice would help them feel more confident in supporting neurodivergent individuals. One professional gave the example of being able to consult with specialised services such as ADHD Solutions when they were in the process of designing an offer, so that it can be reviewed by those with expert knowledge. Another example given by a staff member was to have a Special Point of Contact (SPOC), they described how having a neurodiversity lead in their team, or in CJS partners, that they could go to with questions or advice on how best to support a young person would beneficial.

"We need training or a specific team to deal with and adapt to their needs. He's [young person] missing out because I can't adapt my approaches to him." - Practitioner

Diagnosis

In terms of the differences in support available for young people with and without a diagnosis of a neurodiverse condition, the practitioners interviewed had varying views. Some felt that having a diagnosis increased the support that was available to the young person, especially when working with the pupil referral unit or the National Health Service (NHS). However, some staff highlighted how the long waitlists for CAMHS, which could be up to 18 months long, was a significant barrier for accessing support. They felt that early diagnosis would not only improve support for the young person in the CJS but could also be critical for early intervention and educational support.

This was also seen in the survey, where several respondents described the long waitlists for diagnostic testing and specialist services, and how many young people's needs are overlooked in educational settings. The gaps in support were seen far before a young person entered the CJS, including in schools and a lack of support for parents.

"The initial "referral" or "diagnosis" for neurodiverse individuals seems to have an extortionate waiting lists and so this delays them receiving the support that they require in the first instance." - Survey respondent

Information sharing

One of the major barriers to being able to provide effective support for neurodivergent young people was the lack of information sharing systems among CJS partners. Many participants reported that they had to rely solely on information given to them from the young person or their parent about additional needs. Other professionals described how they could go to the schools or liaison and diversion services to ask about a particular young person. However, for schools, it was felt that they could wait several months before the school got back to them, or that the information provided by schools was dependent on how much the school's senior leadership team was willing to share. The practitioners also highlighted how the difficulties in gathering health or other information on young people is further exacerbated if the young person has not been regularly attending school, has been transient, or for certain demographics, such as travellers.

"It is ridiculously hard to get to view one [Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP)] and same with speech and language records... Those barriers are really unhelpful.... Wholeheartedly adds to duplication and makes it difficult for practitioners." - Practitioner

"We might suspect a need but gathering the information can be hard, especially if they have been transient or not attending school." - Practitioner

CJS professionals also described how they could only get information from liaison and diversion services, if the young person had been referred to CAMHS. However, they also noted that this information was not always accessible as liaison and diversion services did not work all hours, which limited the sharing of this information.

"It'd be a dreamland situation to have all information contained in one area, or have key people being able to access to the information." - Practitioner

The participants also highlighted how the ways in which this information is recorded in the current systems is also a barrier to effectively supporting neurodivergent people. For example, they described how sometimes in AssetPlus, the assessment and intervention framework tool for ASD and ADHD are labelled as mental health conditions, meaning that this information is not always clear and is "squished together." This creates more confusion for staff and makes it difficult for them to determine when someone has an identified need or is awaiting diagnosis.

However, one practitioner emphasised how the level of information sharing varies on a case-by-case basis. For example, they noted that for a high-risk case, there will be several multi-agency meetings where this information is discussed and constantly reviewed. Conversely, they believed that low risk cases would be more likely to "go under the radar." This highlights the need for better information systems throughout the CJS in order to facilitate better support for neurodivergent young people.

Competing priorities and national standards

In the discussions with CJS partners about barriers to effectively supporting neurodivergent young people, many practitioners highlighted the tension between providing individualised support and the potential risks and the constraints of national-level requirements. They highlighted how their main duty is to manage risk, and how there are many national standards that must be met, which do not always permit them to place a young person's individual needs first.

"We drive for continuous improvement and new ideas, but we are governed by the potential risks associated with it." - Practitioner

"It's tricky to do a bespoke service and uphold the law." - Practitioner

To illustrate, practitioners described how cells must fit national standards and requirements, and how the custody environment is not a nice environment for any young person as a result. Nonetheless, they described how within these limits they try to be creative to meet the needs of a young person and treat them with respect. However, because of these requirements and the potential risks of additional adjustments, practitioners felt that they were unable to completely meet individual needs. Some practitioners reflected this sentiment across the CJS, expressing how the CJS as a system is not able to fully support neurodivergent young people, as to do so the CJS on the whole would need to be restructured. This indicates that there are national-level changes which would be required to enable these needs to be met.

Prevention

Finally, many CJS professionals identified how effective support for neurodivergent young people needs to focus on preventing them from coming into contact with the CJS in the first place. This included more access to special education places, earlier involvement of social services, and earlier diagnosis. Staff briefly mentioned how effectively supporting neurodivergent young people in the CJS is much wider than just those in the justice system, but more preventive work with families, social care, and care homes should be done to ensure that young people's needs are being met before they come into contact with the CJS.

In interviews it was also highlighted how many of the neurodivergent young people within in the CJS have been out of school or have had a disruptive educational experience as their needs have not been met in education. CJS professionals felt that being out of education, or not receiving adequate support in education, increased a young person's risk of entering the CJS. This is because it is within schools where many of a young person's needs are identified and where support can be accessed. However, practitioners also reflected that the long waiting lists for services such as CAMHS, has resulted in many young people not being able to get diagnosed, and as a result have not been able to benefit from additional education support in a special school or from an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP).

Key conclusions

The key conclusions from the evidence collected from practitioners are:

- The majority of survey respondents were not sure if their organisation had a definition of neurodiversity or specific policies and procedures relating to the inclusion of neurodivergent people.
- Almost all respondents (n=26) believed that neurodivergent young people are more likely to come into contact with the CJS than neurotypical young people.
- A large majority of survey respondents believe that neurodivergent young people have worse experiences (n=22) and worse outcomes (n=20) than their neurotypical peers in the criminal justice system. However, in the interviews, some participants also reflected that due to the individualised adaptions and increased awareness among CJS professionals, this trend is starting to equalise.
- Just less than one-half (n=14) of respondents believed that CJS partners in LLR sometimes meet the needs of neurodivergent young people. The next most common response was that these needs are rarely met. Staff felt that these needs were rarely met because of a lack of knowledge and resources among CJS partners.
- The majority of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that staff have the capabilities to effectively support neurodivergent young people.
- On average, staff report having a good knowledge of neurodiversity, however, there was a wide variability between practitioners. The availability and completion of training also varied significantly between professionals. This was dependent on the team the practitioner worked for, personal experience and initiative to attend training, and the priorities of those organising training for staff. Staff felt that more training across CJS partners was needed, especially

training that incorporated lived experience and education opportunities for young people and their families.

- Practitioners have made a useful link between the on-going work around trauma informed approaches and neurodiversity. Extending this to ensure how culture, gender and other factors can intersect with neurodiversity would strengthen this understanding.
- Identifying additional needs was believed to be a strength among CJS professionals in LRR. They felt that young people's needs were mostly abled to be identified in risk assessments, health screening tools, and staff's own identification. However, the ability to successfully identify neurodiverse conditions and additional needs varied between practitioners.
- Adaptive communication methods and tools are effectively employed by CJS professionals to support neurodivergent young people. These include using simpler language, pictorial cards, and summary pamphlets. Despite this good practice, staff also highlighted that tools are not consistently available for all information that needs to be communicated to young people. It appears that there are opportunities to build on this through routinely ensuring material is read to young people and that their understanding is checked through the use of appropriate open questions. Resource constraints are likely to be a limiting factor in implementing this.
- Those interviewed also described how they routinely make adaptions to the physical environment, including moving young people to quieter rooms, soft furnishing, and calming toys. Although the practitioners focused on the successful changes that have been made in the custody setting, these should be made available across CJS settings.
- CJS professionals believed that their overall approach of working innovatively to meeting the individual needs, and continually aiming to improve practice, played an important part in helping to effectively support neurodivergent young people.
- Just under one-third of the survey respondents (n=9) agreed that they have the resources to provide this support. However, a similar proportion (n=10) of respondents disagreed that staff had the resources to support neurodivergent young people. The resources and time available to CJS professionals was highlighted as a major barrier to staff being able to work on an individual level and adequately respond to a young person's needs.
- Information sharing systems also created a barrier for staff, as this delayed or limited the information available to practitioners on the needs of young people.
- It was also highlighted by CJS professionals that national standards and the potential risks of making individual adaptions always trump individual needs. This creates instances where individual adaptions or additional support cannot be reasonably put in place.

Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, the CJS in Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland has already made significant progress in supporting neurodivergent young people. There is evidence of practitioners continually adapting their interventions and approach to meet the specific needs of the young person they are working with. However, there are a few key areas of improvement, which will help ensure that effective support for neurodivergent young people is consistently embedded in the work of CJS professionals across LLR. The findings are thematically summarised below with the relevant recommendations.

Experience and outcomes of neurodivergent young people in the CJS

Although there was evidence of professionals across CJS partners having a good understanding of neurodiversity and adapting their practice accordingly, this is not seen consistently in policy or practice across the CJS in Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland.

The survey revealed that over-three quarters of respondents (n=25) believed that the CJS as a whole only sometimes or rarely meets the needs of neurodivergent young people. Similarly, a large majority of respondents believed that neurodivergent young people had both worse experiences (n=22) and worse outcomes than their neurotypical peers (n=20). This was also reflected in the qualitative fieldwork, where participants noted how activities such as unpaid work may not be suitable for all neurodivergent young people, and that there exists a need to have alternatives that can be tailored to individual needs.

These findings suggest that although there is evidence of good practice, there is still room for improvement to ensure that effective support for neurodivergent young people is embedded in both policy and practice for all CJS partners.

Knowledge and awareness

Across the rapid evidence review, qualitative research, and survey, knowledge and training were some of the key factors mentioned. Overall, CJS staff in LLR felt like they had an awareness and understanding of neurodiversity, however, this varied significantly between individuals. It was based on personal experience, previous work history, and training that was available to the individual and their team.

The survey found that the majority of respondents believed that staff had the capabilities to provide effective support for neurodivergent young people, this represented just over one-half of the respondents (n=18). Additionally, an equal proportion of respondents indicated that most (n=11) or some (n=11) of the staff have an understanding of neurodiversity in their organisation. Again, highlighting the range of knowledge surrounding neurodiversity among CJS professionals. However, in terms of organisation-wide understanding of neurodiversity, the majority of survey respondents agreed that some staff were knowledgeable about neurodiversity, but there was no organisation-wide policy or practice of inclusive support.

Importantly, training and education was identified in both the qualitative research and survey as one of the biggest gaps in terms of being able to provide effective support for neurodivergent young people. The importance of education and training was also highlighted in the good practice as a crucial element in identifying additional needs, providing effective support, and working against stereotypes and misconceptions about neurodiversity.

Therefore, it can be seen providing training and education opportunities to CJS professionals and partners will be crucial in improving effective support for neurodivergent young people. All staff should be trained on neurodiversity, including how to identify conditions, reasonable adjustments that can be made, and how to provide effective support. This training should be available to all staff and should reoccur regularly so that their knowledge stays up to date. From the good practice identified in the evidence review, more in depth training could support staff to increase their knowledge on the breadth of neurodiversity, including comorbidities, and how neurodiversity intersects with gender identity, ethnicity, and sexuality.

A comprehensive training needs analysis should be conducted to inform priorities concerning the content, scope, audience, and timeframes for the training.

Recommendation: Conduct a training needs analysis to inform a programme of regular training for all CJS staff on identifying neurodiversity, adapting communication, and managing behaviour. The training should include the experiences of those with lived experience.

In addition, through the research it is clear that many practitioners are knowledgeable and experienced in working with neurodivergent young people. Practitioners expressed a desire to be able to learn from their colleagues, both within the same team, and wider CJS partners. Creating opportunities for staff to come together to share their experiences of what works, what does not work, and any expertise they have, will improve staff knowledge and increase the dialogue around neurodiversity among CJS partners.

To help share knowledge and ensure action across CJS partners, a multi-disciplinary task and finish group could be created. For example, this group could take responsibility for tasks such as: reviewing documentation and adaptions, commissioning training and a training needs analysis, developing educational material for use with young people and their families, and mapping support across LLR. This will help create unified approach across CJS actors in LLR and ensure that action points are followed through.

Recommendation: Create a task and finish group responsible for reviewing the support for neurodivergent young people in the CJS, commissioning training, and developing educational materials.

Another key aspect of training and awareness concerns the understanding of neurodiversity among young people and their families. Several CJS professionals in both the interviews and the survey reflected that young people had not received any support after receiving a diagnosis and sometimes did not understand how their condition may affect their behaviour or cognition. They believed that if the young people and their families had a better knowledge of neurodiversity, this would allow the staff to be able to better support them and make any required adjustments.

Recommendation: Work to increase the knowledge and awareness around neurodiversity among young people and their families.

Communication and environmental adaptions

Both the interviews with staff and the good practice review highlighted the importance of communication adaptions in order to effectively support neurodivergent young people. The good practice review highlighted a range of tools that can be used to support effective communication with neurodivergent young people, including visual aids, using simpler language, and ensuring understanding. These practices were consistently identified in the focus groups and interviews as areas where staff were successful in adapting their practice.

Across the interviews and focus groups, the participants described how they use a variety of communication methods and tools, including easy-read and visual formats for communicating key information. However, this was dependent on the individual practitioner knowing when and how to adapt their communication methods to suit an individual young person. All information that needs to be communicated to a young person, including their rights, any processes, and decisions they must make, must be available in visual and easy-read formats. These adaptions should be in place consistently across the CJS partners and will help improve the support for neurodivergent young people across LLR.

In addition to having these tools available, staff need to be aware that they are available, know when they may be need, and ensure to verify that the young person has accurately understood the information communicated to them. In the good practice review, tools such as a summary sheet or catalogue of adaptions were cited as a helpful resource for professionals to be able to consult as reminder of what adaptions are available and appropriate.

Recommendation: All information should be communicated simply and clearly. It should also be available in easy-read and visual formats, including flow charts, timelines, body diagrams, and summary sheets. Practitioners should always check understanding through open-ended questions.

Furthermore, adaptions to the physical environment were also highlighted in the good practice review as important measures to ensure that neurodivergent young people, especially those with sensory sensitivities, can be effectively supported. Evidence from the qualitative research suggests that this is widely seen in LLR, especially in custody settings. Therefore, for all environments which a young person may encounter through the CJS, it should be reviewed if any adaptions to the physical environment could be made to better support those with sensory difficulties.

Recommendation: Consider how the physical environment appropriate for those with specific sensory needs and make reasonable adjustments wherever possible.

Resources

In addition, across the qualitative research, survey, and good practice review, the importance of taking an individualised and holistic approach to working with young people was consistently highlighted as key to effectively supporting neurodivergent young people in the CJS, as this allowed the unique needs of a young person to be understood and met. In the qualitative research adapting interventions, communication styles, and methods of support were consistently noted by participants as the ways in which they believe they are able to successfully provide effective support for neurodivergent individuals.

For this, it is crucial that at the outset of any interaction with young people, all staff should directly ask the individual if they have any additional needs or require alternative support in order to effectively engage and promptly put these adjustments in place if available.

Recommendation: Staff should always ask direct questions about known neurodiverse conditions, and if there is any additional or alternative support a young person may require.

However, in both the survey and the interviews, the CJS professionals noted that many teams do not have the time, resources, or budget to be able to work with every young person in this way. Although many professionals emphasised that their colleagues went the extra mile to support young people, often using their own time to do so. However, for other professionals, their service was designed around this model, and they are adequately resourced to do so. This is reflected in the survey which found that just over one-third (n=11) of those surveyed believed that staff have the resources to understand and support neurodivergent young people. On the other hand, one-third of respondents (n=10) did not believe that they had adequate resources to support these young people. In order to be able to effectively support neurodivergent young people, all professionals across the CJS, need to give the time and resources so that they can understand their needs and make appropriate adaptions. This will help ensure that they are supported in their work and that a tailored approach can be taken be all professionals.

Recommendation: Ensure that resources are easily available so that staff can make more frequent use of them. This will help ensure that they can take an individualised approach to working with all young people.

Information sharing

Moreover, in both the good practice review and the interviews and focus groups, the importance of sharing information among and between CJS professionals was highlighted as a key gap in terms of effectively supporting neurodivergent young people through the CJS. In the interviews and focus groups, practitioners described how they must often rely on information on diagnosis or additional support from the young person or their family. This is because of the difficulty in accessing EHCP plans and information regarding young people's additional needs from schools and other services. Among CJS partners, practitioners also reported how information on neurodiversity can sometimes be recorded together with mental health conditions in the AssestPlus programme, creating confusion for staff. As highlighted in the rapid evidence review, CJS professionals need to be able to efficiently communicate the needs of the young people, so that staff from each service that engages with the young person is aware of their needs and meet them without delay. Therefore, improving information sharing systems between CJS partners will help ensure that the needs of a young person can be transmitted between CJS partners, which will help streamline support and reduce duplication between practitioners.

Recommendation: Improve systems for recording and communicating information about neurodiversity and additional needs so that CJS practitioners are aware of any additional needs and support a young person requires.

Recommendation: Consider if and how School Liaison Officers can support with the sharing of information between schools and the CJS, particularly in relation to the identification of young people identified with SEND needs and EHCP.

Prevention

Finally, many CJS professionals in the qualitative research and survey identified how effective support for neurodivergent young people needs to start before they first encounter the CJS. For example, this included improving the support for young people in education and social services. The long waitlists for diagnosis and specialist support were frequently mentioned by CJS professionals as barriers to accessing this support earlier. It was felt that earlier identification and reaction to a young person's individualised needs, would help reduce their risk of coming into contact with the CJS in the first place. As a result, systemic improvements in the support for neurodivergent young people in the criminal justice system, will require similar improvements in educational settings, social services, and clinical services.

Appendix - Glossary

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder- ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition whose symptoms includes inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.[46]

Autism spectrum disorder/ condition- This refers to people who have been diagnosed with autism, which is developmental disability. It is a spectrum condition because autism affects people differently.[47]

Criminal justice system (CJS)- The CJS includes the police, custody, probation, youth offending teams, Youth Court, and other actors involved in the justice system.

Neurodiversity- Neurodiversity is an umbrella term which refers to the fact that there are natural differences in how people process information and how their brains work.[48] This can include ASD, ADHD, learning disabilities, traumatic brain injury, etc.

Neurotypical- This describes someone whose patterns of cognition, behaviour, and brain functioning are regarded as normal in society.

Sensory difficulties- This describes how some people process sensory information differently, including both over and under-sensitivity to sensory inputs.

Special educational needs/ special educational needs and disabilities- Includes learning difficulties and disabilities where a young person requires additional support in education or health.

[46] Centre for Disease Control. What is ADHD? Link
[47] NHS Inform. Autism Spectrum Disorder. Link
[48] Revolving Doors. (2022). Exploring the Links Between Neurodiversity and the Revolving Door of Crisis and Crime. Link