

## 'The Importance of Neuroinclusion at Work' - An interview with Sam Palmer, CEO of Respect for All

April is Neurodiversity Awareness Month. For this edition of 'Just One Thing' we sat down with Sam Palmer, CEO of Respect for All. Respect for All offers specialist counselling and group support services for autistic and/or learning disabled people and their families and carers who live in Greater Manchester. You can learn more about their work [here](#).

This interview uses a form of bionic reading – a typeset where the focal points of text are written in bold. This makes reading easier and faster for many neurodivergent people.

*Q: The Social Model of Disability states that people with disabilities face limitations due to the social structures in place, and not because of their disability itself. This is particularly true for neurodivergent people. In light of this, what are some of the challenges neurodiverse employees may face at work?*

A: The Social Model of Disability helps us understand that the barriers neurodivergent employees face at work are often not due to their neurodivergence itself, but rather the way workplaces are structured. For example, rigid expectations around communication, sensory environments that can be overwhelming, and one-size-fits-all performance management can create significant challenges. Many neurodivergent employees struggle with **unrealistic expectations around eye contact, social norms, or time management** that don't align with their natural ways of working. Open-plan offices can be **overstimulating** for autistic individuals or those with ADHD. Strict meeting formats might disadvantage people with **processing differences**, and inflexible working arrangements can make it harder for people to work in a way that suits their strengths. By making **reasonable adjustments, fostering acceptance, and valuing different thinking styles**, employers can remove these barriers and create a truly inclusive environment, which is something we strive towards at Respect for All, where we offer a fully flexible and inclusive working 'environment'.

*Q: 65% of neurodivergent people would not disclose their neurodiversity to their line manager at work. This can lead to a concept called 'masking', can you tell us more about what masking is and how this can affect a neurodivergent person?*

A: Masking is when a neurodivergent person **suppresses or hides their natural traits** to fit into a neurotypical environment. This can include mimicking social behaviours, forcing eye contact, suppressing stims, or over-preparing for interactions to avoid being perceived as different. Many neurodivergent people feel pressure to mask at work due to **stigma, discrimination, or fear of not being taken seriously**. The mental load of masking is exhausting and can lead to **burnout, anxiety, and depression**. It also means employers may not see the full potential of their employees, as they are using so much energy just trying to appear 'acceptable' rather than focusing on their work. Workplaces need to shift from expecting neurodivergent people to adapt, towards **creating an environment where they feel safe to be themselves**—without fear of judgment or negative consequences.

*Q: An estimated 15-20% of the UK's population is neurodivergent. How can organisations work to create a neuro-inclusive workforce?*

A: To build a neuro-inclusive workforce, organisations need to move beyond ‘awareness’ and take **concrete action** to support neurodivergent employees. This includes:

- **Flexible working** – Adjusting hours, workspaces, and communication methods.
- **Clear and direct communication** – Avoiding ambiguity and making instructions explicit.
- **Sensory-friendly environments** – Offering quiet spaces, noise reduction, or remote working options.
- **Neurodiversity-inclusive hiring** – Removing unnecessary barriers in recruitment, such as assessing social confidence over actual skills.
- **Leadership training** – Educating managers on neurodiversity so they can **provide the right support, not just assume what’s best**.

It’s not about making small accommodations—it’s about **changing workplace culture to recognise and embrace different ways of thinking, working, and thriving**

*Q: Neurodiversity can be a difficult thing to speak up about for some people. What would your advice be to someone who is neurodivergent and wanting to be more open about it?*

A: Deciding whether to disclose your neurodivergence is deeply personal, and there is no right or wrong answer. My advice would be:

- **Understand your needs first** – Think about what support or adjustments would actually make your work life better.
- **Test the waters** – If you’re unsure about how your workplace will respond, start by speaking to a trusted colleague or accessing employee networks.
- **Know your rights** – The Equality Act 2010 protects neurodivergent employees from discrimination, and you are entitled to reasonable adjustments.
- **Frame it in terms of strengths** – If you choose to disclose, you could highlight how your neurodivergence brings unique skills and ways of thinking that benefit your work.

Ultimately, **you don’t owe anyone disclosure**, but if you feel safe to do so, it can help build a culture where neurodivergence is recognised and valued rather than hidden. If you want someone to speak to about this, at Respect for All we run an online peer group so neurodivergent people can share experiences, create new connections and know that they are not alone with these experiences and feelings.

*Q: There are lots of myths and misconceptions surrounding neurodiversity. What is one myth that you would like to correct?*

A: One of the biggest myths about neurodivergence is that it only affects children or that you ‘grow out of it’ in adulthood. Many autistic people, ADHDers, and others only **receive a**

**diagnosis later in life** because they masked their traits or because awareness was lower when they were younger. Neurodivergent adults exist in **every workplace, every profession, and every level of leadership**, and they don't 'outgrow' their neurodivergence—it's a lifelong difference. By challenging this myth, we can stop dismissing the struggles neurodivergent adults face and start ensuring they receive the **understanding, support, and acceptance** they deserve at every stage of life, which is our approach at Respect for All.

*The Interview was conducted by Jessica Draper at Manchester Community Central as part of the 'Just One Thing' segment of 'Policy Voice'.*