

 KEY TAKEAWAYS

Neurodiversity in hospitality:

Building inclusive teams

In partnership with  Springboard





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Key learnings from our *neurodiversity breakfast event*

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Accessible pathways

Providing accessible routes into hospitality enables neurodiverse individuals to thrive and contribute meaningfully.

2. Tailored support

Organisations like Springboard successfully match neurodiverse candidates with suitable employers, significantly improving retention rates.

3. Unique strengths

Neurodiverse employees enhance workplace accessibility and communication, benefiting both staff and customers.

4. Inclusive recruitment

Adapting recruitment strategies and challenging misconceptions about neurodiverse individuals are essential for creating a more inclusive hiring process.

5. Effective communication

Regular engagement and transparency during the application process are crucial for fostering an inclusive environment.



Introduction

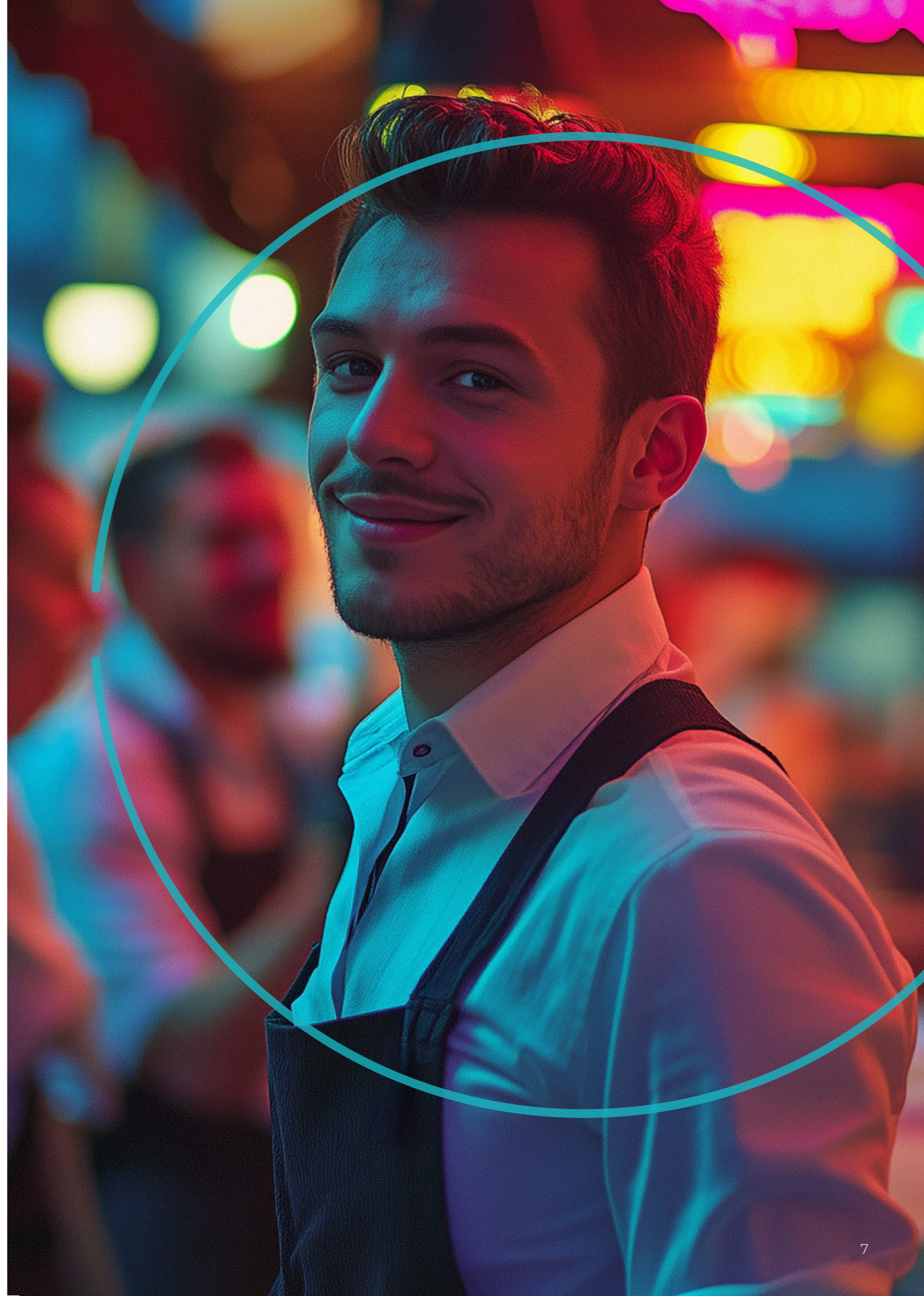
In today's diverse hospitality industry, understanding and embracing neurodiversity is more crucial than ever.

This report is a reflection of insights gathered from our recent neurodiversity breakfast event, 'Neurodiversity in hospitality: Building inclusive teams', in [Chaophraya](#), Edinburgh. Our speakers, [Sophie Pace-Balzan](#), [Kelly Johnstone](#), [Ted Blackwell](#) and [Dorothea Jones](#), shared valuable insights and personal stories that highlighted the need for inclusivity within the sector.

For those who could not attend the event, this eGuide serves to ensure that the valuable discussions and learnings are not missed.

By capturing the key themes and insights presented, we aim to provide a comprehensive resource that empowers hospitality professionals to create more inclusive environments for neurodiverse individuals.

Through this report, we hope to inspire a deeper understanding of neurodiversity and encourage actionable change that enhances both employee satisfaction and customer experience in the hospitality sector.



Understanding *neurodiversity in hospitality*

Neurodiversity refers to the natural variations in human brain functioning, encompassing conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia and more.

Recognising and embracing neurodiversity is essential for fostering inclusive environments that enhance innovation and improve customer experiences in the hospitality industry.

DOROTHEA JONES' TAKE ON NEURODIVERSITY

Dorothea Jones articulated a compelling definition of neurodiversity, explaining that it encompasses the natural variations in how individuals think and process information.

She emphasised that these differences should be respected rather than seen as deficits. Using the analogy of Apple and Android smartphones, Dorothea illustrated that both types perform similar tasks but do so in unique ways - just as neurodivergent and neurotypical brains function differently.

THE MIXING BOARD ANALOGY

Dorothea further explained that neurodiversity should be viewed like a mixing board with various dials rather than a spectrum.

Each dial represents different traits and strengths. 'Instead of thinking of neurodiversity as a linear spectrum, consider it as a complex mixing desk,' she said. 'Each person has a unique configuration of strengths and challenges, contributing to a rich diversity of thought'.

This understanding is crucial in hospitality, where creativity and diverse perspectives enhance service delivery.

Recognising and embracing these differences can drive innovation and improve team dynamics.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HOSPITALITY

The insights shared at the event highlight the critical need for hospitality businesses to foster an inclusive environment.

By understanding neurodiversity through the lens of unique traits and the importance of different perspectives, organisations can create workplaces that not only support neurodivergent individuals but also thrive because of their contributions.

“

For me, my dial for lights and sounds on the mixing desk is pretty high, but my dial for food is pretty low, I can eat mostly anything. So, for me, my mixing desk analogy helps illustrate that neurodiversity is not a linear spectrum”

- Dorothea Jones

How to build *inclusive teams*

The breakfast gathering featured inspiring narratives from neurodivergent employees who shared their journeys and the support they received in the hospitality sector.

Sophie Pace-Balzan's story was particularly poignant.

As a neurodivergent employee at **Johnnie Walker**, she explained how Springboard's support helped her transition into the industry, emphasising the importance of clear communication and reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

SOPHIE'S JOURNEY

Sophie, a 19-year-old neurodivergent employee, entered the hospitality sector after finding academic routes challenging.

Living with a functional neurological disorder, Tourette syndrome and other conditions along the neurodiverse spectrum, Sophie's journey to employment was not straightforward.

However, with the support of **Springboard**, she navigated the complexities of entering the workforce in a way that showcased her strengths.

CLEAR COMMUNICATION AND STRUCTURE

One of the primary ways Sophie's journey was made easier was through the implementation of clear communication protocols within her team.

At Johnnie Walker, Sophie expressed the need for **structured plans in her daily tasks**.

For instance, having a clear outline of her responsibilities and expectations allowed her to feel confident and focussed in her role. Her manager established regular check-ins to discuss her progress and address any concerns, which helped her manage her workload effectively.

This level of communication not only benefited Sophie but also enhanced the overall clarity and efficiency within her team.

However, it was made clear by Sophie that this is just her preferred style of working and everyone works differently (neurodivergent or otherwise). She highlighted the importance of communicating with staff to understand their learning and communication styles and creating bespoke arrangements to support them accordingly.

REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

Sophie's experience at Johnnie Walker also highlighted the importance of reasonable adjustments.

For example, Sophie sometimes needed a wheelchair due to mobility challenges. The management ensured that accessibility was prioritised within the workplace by:

1. Ensuring accessible facilities

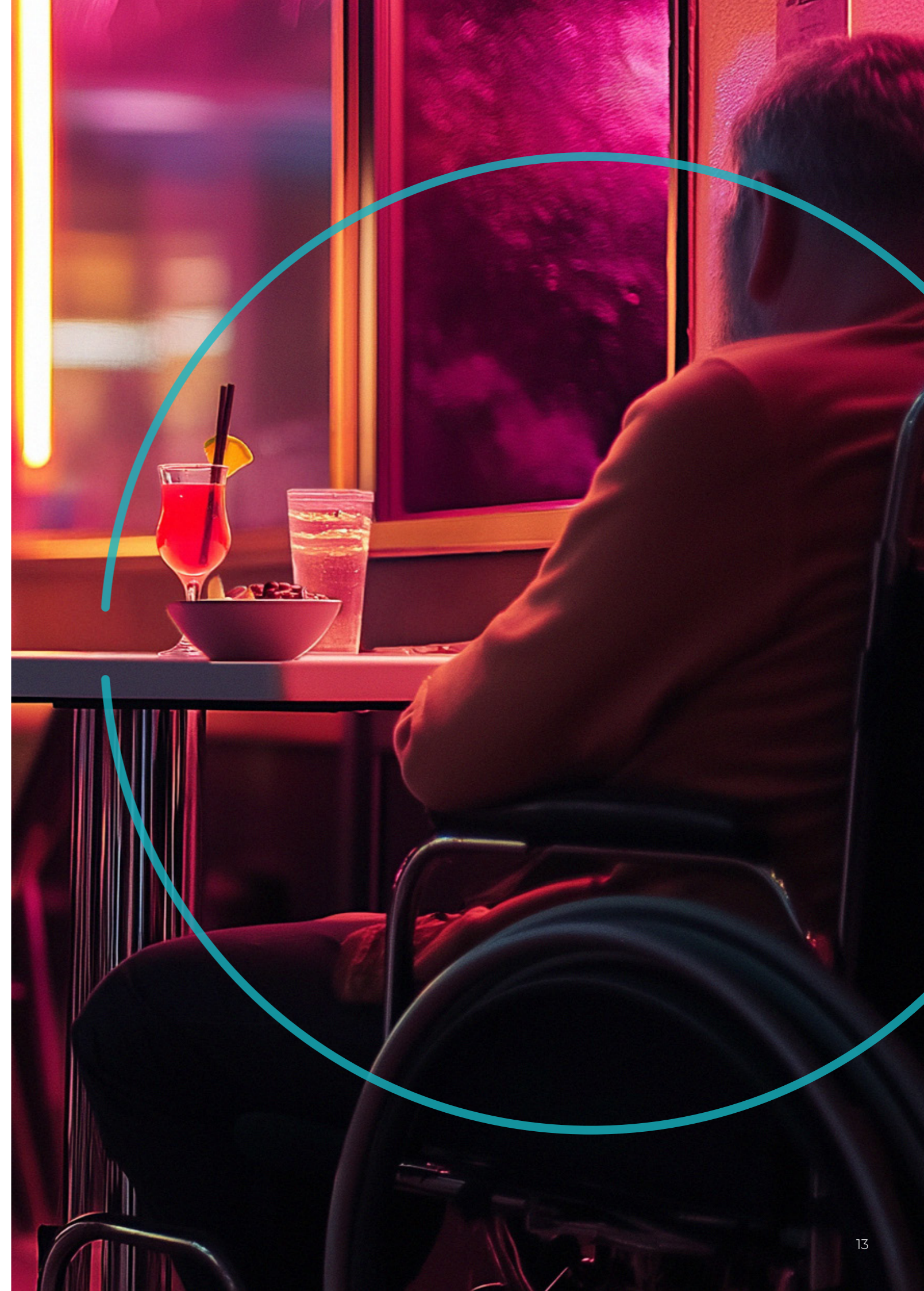
The lifts were regularly maintained and wheelchairs were made available for both staff and guests.

This proactive approach not only improved Sophie's comfort but also created a more inclusive environment for all individuals with mobility challenges.

2. Flexible work hours

On particularly challenging days, Sophie was given the option to take extra breaks or adjust her work hours.

This flexibility allowed her to manage fatigue without compromising her responsibilities, contributing to her overall job satisfaction.



FOSTERING INCLUSIVITY THROUGH TEAM DYNAMICS

Sophie's neurodivergent perspective also brought unique strengths to her team.

By needing a structured environment, she helped foster clearer processes and expectations among her colleagues. For instance, she introduced the idea of visual cues for tasks, which benefitted the entire team by enhancing communication and clarity.

When discussing her experience, Sophie mentioned that her role allowed her to be a voice for accessibility.

For example, her mobility challenges led to discussions about improving overall workplace accessibility, such as ensuring that pathways were clear and easily navigable for all staff and guests.

This not only made her feel valued but also positively impacted the team dynamic by encouraging everyone to consider inclusivity in their daily operations.

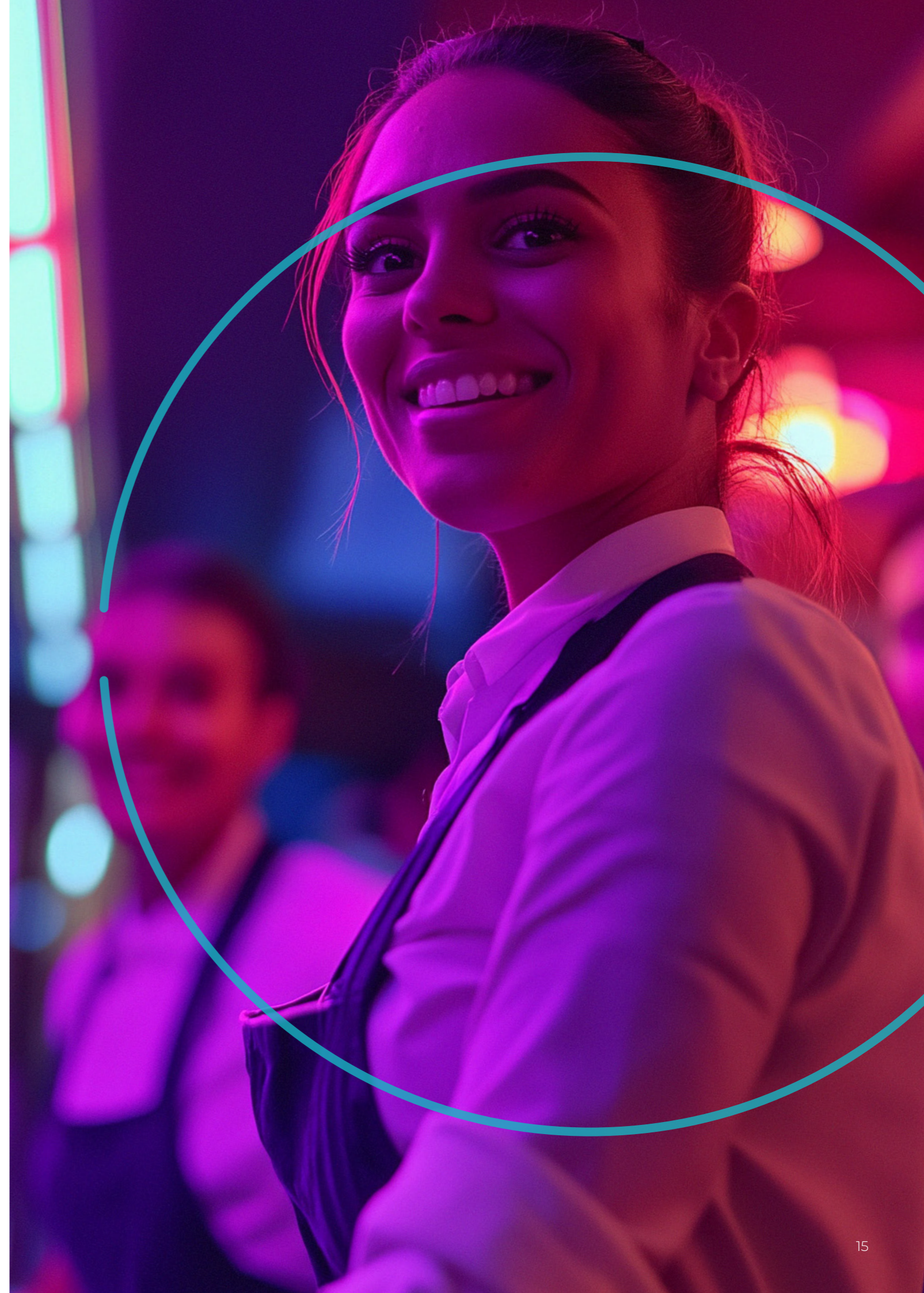
BROADER IMPLICATIONS OF SOPHIE'S STORY

Sophie's journey exemplifies the significant impact that tailored support and reasonable adjustments can have in the hospitality sector.

Her experiences align with findings from [The Burnt Chef Project](#), which emphasises how neurodivergent individuals, when supported properly, can thrive and drive positive change within their workplaces.

Her story also echoes the mission of organisations like Springboard, which actively works to provide accessible pathways into the hospitality industry for neurodiverse individuals.

By matching candidates like Sophie with employers willing to embrace and accommodate their needs, they not only improve individual career outcomes but also enhance the overall quality and diversity of the hospitality workforce.



Creating *inclusive environments*

Creating an inclusive culture in hospitality is not merely about compliance; it requires a fundamental shift in mindset and practice.

The insights shared at our neurodiversity breakfast event underscore the importance of fostering an environment where neurodivergent individuals can thrive. This chapter outlines key strategies discussed during the event, supported by examples and insights from speakers.

EMBRACING FLEXIBILITY AND UNDERSTANDING

One of the core themes from the event was the need for flexibility in work arrangements.

Dorothea Jones emphasised that each neurodivergent individual has unique needs and preferences. She noted that, 'Understanding neurodiversity means recognising that one size does not fit all. We must adapt our environments to meet individual needs'.

Practical examples of flexibility

To illustrate this, Dorothea suggested implementing flexible working arrangements such as:

1. Quiet spaces

Creating designated quiet areas where neurodivergent staff can retreat to recharge during busy shifts.

This approach helps employees manage sensory overload, fostering a more supportive environment.

2. Adjustable work hours

Allowing neurodivergent employees to modify their schedules based on their energy levels can lead to improved performance.

As Sophie highlighted, having the option to take extra breaks when feeling fatigued significantly contributed to her well-being and productivity.

UTILISING SPRINGBOARD'S CAREERSCOPE

Another significant resource discussed at the event was [Springboard's CareerScope](#), a service designed to support neurodiverse individuals in their job search.

Kelly Johnstone and Ted Blackwell explained how CareerScope provides tailored guidance, helping candidates navigate the employment process with confidence.

The inclusion of resources like CareerScope not only helps candidates like Sophie find suitable employment but also prepares them for success within their roles, ensuring that their neurodiversity is seen as an asset rather than a hindrance.

“

On particularly challenging days, I was given the option to take extra breaks or adjust my work hours. This flexibility allowed me to manage fatigue without compromising my responsibilities, contributing to my overall job satisfaction.”

- Sophie Pace-Balzan

CULTIVATING OPEN DIALOGUE

During the event, our host, **Ken Ume**, emphasised the importance of creating an open dialogue about neurodiversity within teams. He noted that, 'By fostering conversations about neurodiversity, we can dismantle misconceptions and build a culture of empathy and support'.

Strategies for encouraging dialogue

To illustrate this, Dorothea suggested implementing flexible working arrangements such as:

1. Team learning

Conduct regular **learning sessions** focussed on neurodiversity to enhance awareness and understanding among all staff.

This initiative promotes a culture where neurodivergent individuals feel safe to disclose their needs and seek accommodations.

2. Mentorship programmes

Establishing mentorship programmes can facilitate peer support and guidance for neurodivergent employees, allowing them to navigate challenges in the workplace more effectively.

ADDRESSING MISCONCEPTIONS

Dorothea also discussed the misconceptions surrounding neurodivergent individuals in the workplace. She explained, 'Often, neurodivergent people are pigeonholed based on stereotypes. It's crucial for employers to understand that every individual is unique and may have different strengths and challenges'.

Combatting stereotypes

To combat these stereotypes, organisations can:

1. Highlight success stories

Share success stories of neurodivergent employees within the organisation to illustrate their contributions and unique strengths, thereby normalising discussions around neurodiversity.

2. Develop inclusive recruitment practices

Adapt recruitment strategies to emphasise the organisation's commitment to inclusivity.

For instance, being transparent in job advertisements about accommodations available for neurodiverse candidates can alleviate fears of discrimination during the application process.

LONG-LASTING SUPPORT

Creating an inclusive environment in hospitality is a multifaceted effort that requires commitment from all levels of the organisation.

The insights shared during our breakfast event underscore the importance of flexibility, understanding and open dialogue. By implementing these strategies and leveraging resources like Springboard's CareerScope and [Mapal's Culture Suite](#), hospitality businesses can create a culture that not only embraces neurodiversity but thrives because of it.

As we continue to engage in these conversations and take actionable steps toward inclusivity, we pave the way for a richer, more diverse hospitality workforce that benefits employees and customers alike.

To wrap it up...

The discussions at our 'Neurodiversity in hospitality: Building inclusive teams' event emphasised that embracing neurodiversity is not just a moral imperative; it is a strategic advantage for the hospitality sector.

By recognising and harnessing the unique strengths of neurodiverse individuals, hospitality businesses can enhance service quality, foster innovation and create a supportive workplace.

As we move towards a more inclusive future, it is essential for the industry to commit to ongoing education, open dialogue, and practical action that prioritises neurodiversity. By doing so, we can build teams that reflect the diversity of our guests and enrich their experiences.



Supporting neurodivergent staff with *Mapal's Culture Suite*

At the heart of fostering an inclusive workplace for neurodivergent staff is effective communication and tailored support.

Mapal's Culture Suite offers an array of features designed to address the unique needs of neurodivergent employees and their employers, directly aligning with the insights shared during our recent neurodiversity breakfast event.

CLEAR COMMUNICATION THROUGH TASK MANAGEMENT

One of the key challenges highlighted by our event speakers was the need for clear communication regarding tasks and responsibilities.

Compliance by Mapal serves as a comprehensive task management system that not only streamlines compliance checks but also allows users to create customisable checklists tailored to specific needs.

Checklists for clarity

The checklist feature enables neurodivergent staff to have structured outlines of what needs to be accomplished, reducing anxiety around remembering tasks.

Users can easily layout their tasks, and the ability to add comments or attach images helps clarify instructions, making it simpler for everyone to understand their responsibilities.

How-to guides and procedures

It also allows the upload of detailed how-to guides, known as procedure pages.

These resources can include bullet-pointed steps and images, providing staff with easy reference materials. This feature is especially beneficial for neurodivergent individuals who may require additional support to recall procedures or understand specific tasks.

EFFECTIVE TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

The importance of fostering open dialogue within teams was another major theme from the event.

Mapal's Culture Suite addresses this need through its **Flow Learning Feed** (accessible on our **Mapal One app** - the one-stop shop for all Culture Suite applications). This allows for segmented communication across different groups and sites.

Personalised top-down communication and forums

Where employers need to share essential information with staff, the ability to personalise a broadcast message is a key way to ensure inclusion for neurodiverse employees.

Forums can also play a powerful role in supporting safe two-way conversation spaces to share their insights and suggestions regarding their work environment or processes.

Discussion points for inclusivity

Employers can establish dedicated groups focussed on neurodiversity, facilitating discussions that allow employees to contribute ideas on how to improve workplace inclusivity.

This engagement fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment among neurodivergent staff.



USER-FRIENDLY FEATURES

Our Culture Suite has also implemented user-friendly design elements to enhance accessibility for all users, particularly neurodivergent individuals.

Adjustable carousel timing

The Flow Learning platform includes a carousel feature for displaying key information, designed with neurodiversity in mind.

The duration for which information remains visible is carefully timed to allow users ample opportunity to read without feeling overwhelmed.

Minimal distractions

The design minimises flashing lights and overwhelming visual stimuli, creating a more comfortable and less stressful experience for neurodivergent users who may be sensitive to such distractions.



YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS

By integrating these features, organisations can effectively support neurodivergent staff, ensuring that they have the tools and resources needed to thrive in their roles.

Our Culture Suite's focus on clear communication, tailored guidance and user-friendly design reflects a commitment to inclusivity that aligns with the goals discussed at our neurodiversity breakfast event.

As we continue to prioritise these values, Mapal's Culture Suite stands ready to assist hospitality businesses in creating environments where all employees, including those with neurodiverse backgrounds, can excel and contribute their unique strengths.

If you would like to learn more about how Mapal's Culture Suite can support you and your neurodivergent staff, [click here](#).

Recommended *resources*

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

1. The Burnt Chef Project: How Being Neurodivergent in Hospitality Can Be Your Biggest Strength
2. HIT Training: Helping Neurodiverse Professionals Succeed in Hospitality
3. Thrive Learning: How to Create Inclusive Hospitality Environments for Neurodiversity
4. Umbrella Training: Neurodiversity Celebration Week 2024
5. Countertalk: A Guide to Neurodiversity for Employers

LINKS AND REFERENCES

1. Neurodiversity Hub
2. ACAS Guide on Neurodiversity in the Workplace



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