



Creating and Supporting Inclusive Environments for Neurodivergent Volunteers

Kym Hume M.Ed.

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Today's Goals

- Clarifying the term neurodivergent
- Strengths of persons with neurodivergent ways of thinking
- Barriers neurodivergent persons face in typical workplaces
- Thinking about your environment and how you can prepare it for neurodivergent volunteers
- A toolbox of strategies for the inclusive workplace

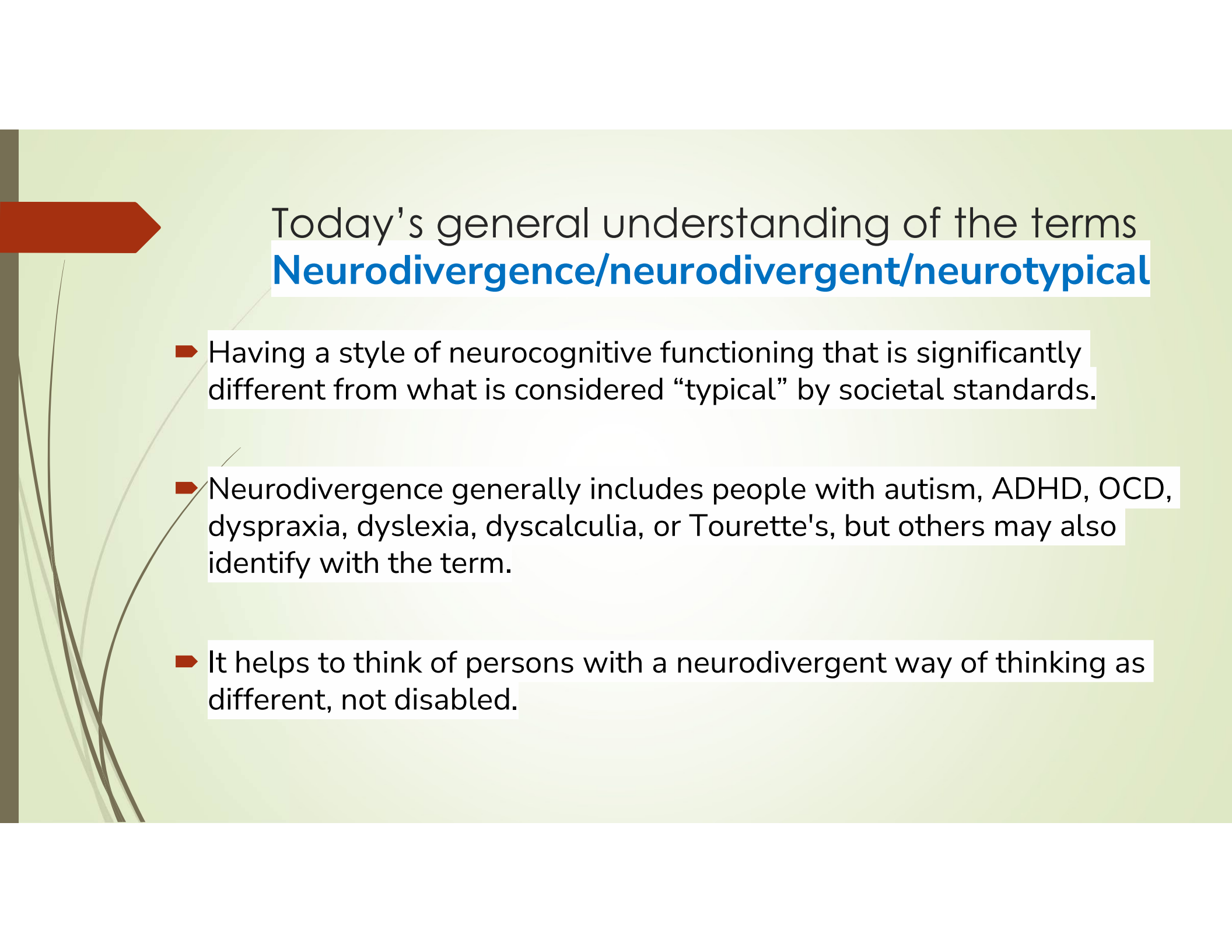
We are all
neurodivergent,
aren't we?



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The development of the term neurodivergent/neurodiversity

- The concept of neurodiversity was coined by [Judy Singer](#), a sociologist on the autism spectrum, in the 1990s.^[1]
- The idea behind neurodiversity is that it is **acceptable** for people to have brains that **function differently**, and that there is not a “right” way to think, learn, and behave. In this way, the neurodiversity movement calls on society to **adjust to neurodivergence** rather than the other way around.
- Rather than viewing neurological diversity as inherently pathological, instead asserting that neurological differences should be **recognized and respected as a social category on a par with gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability status**. (Neurodiversityhub.org)

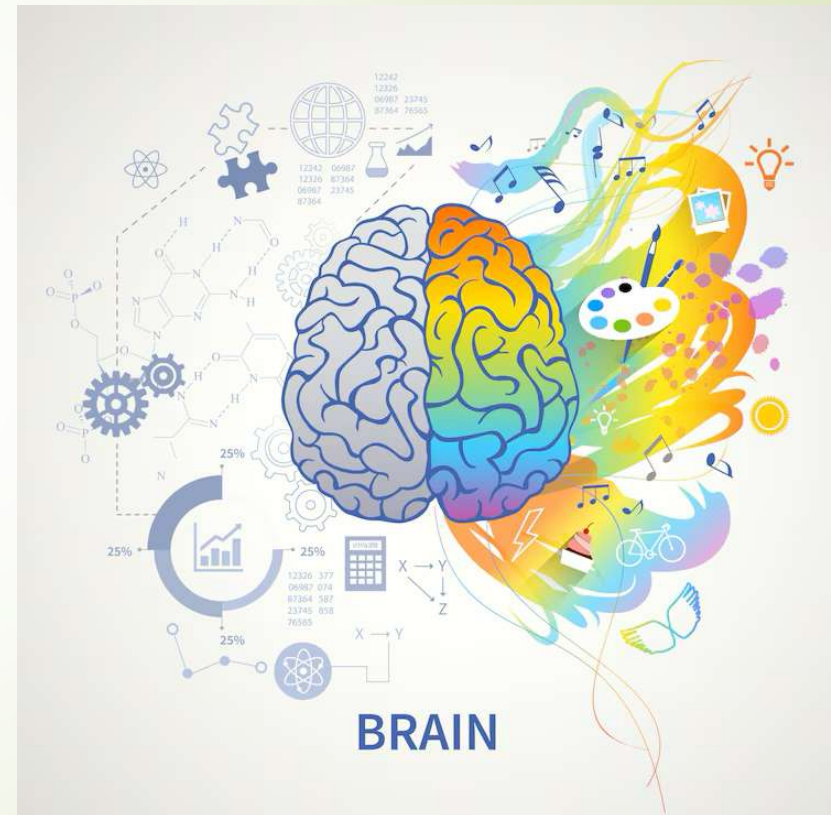


Today's general understanding of the terms **Neurodivergence/neurodivergent/neurotypical**

- Having a style of neurocognitive functioning that is significantly different from what is considered “typical” by societal standards.
- Neurodivergence generally includes people with autism, ADHD, OCD, dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, or Tourette's, but others may also identify with the term.
- It helps to think of persons with a neurodivergent way of thinking as different, not disabled.

Temple Grandin: The World Needs All Kinds of Minds

- Visual Thinkers
- Verbal /Logic Thinkers
- Pattern Thinkers





Why include (or hire) neurodivergent people in the organization/workplace?

- It fosters **innovation and creativity** by harnessing a variety of **perspectives and thinking styles**.
- Neurodivergent individuals often possess **unique problem-solving skills** and approaches that can lead to **fresh insights and novel solutions** to complex challenges.
- A neurodiverse workforce promotes **inclusivity and diversity**, which enhances employee morale, engagement, and retention.

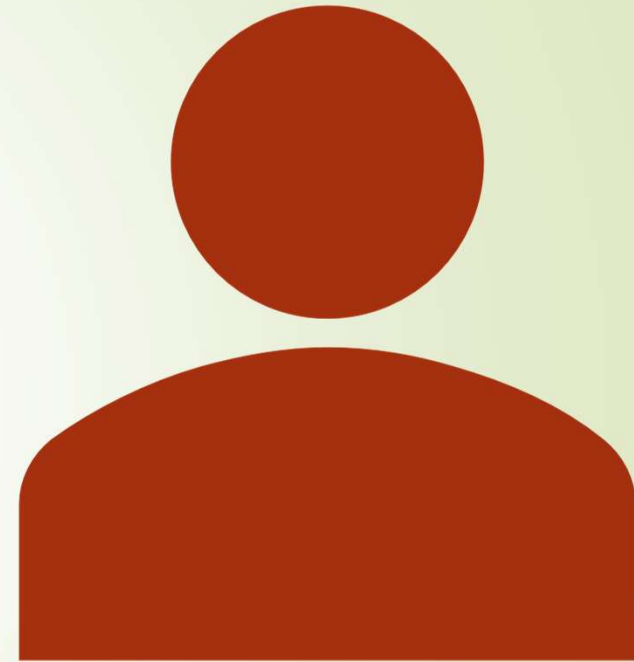
Neurodivergent skills and talents in the workplace

- A **different** way of thinking
- **Creative** problem solving
- **Focused** and sustained attention to detail
- High level of **accuracy** and spotting patterns and repetition
- High ability in finding and mentally **retaining facts**



Neurodivergent skills and talents in the workplace

- Thinking from a **different perspective**, different point of view
- Loves **routine** and following **rules**
- **Precise** and **careful** approach to a task
- Not content with shoddy work, will spend energy **making it right**



Neurodivergent skills and talents in the workplace

- Less judgmental about others
- Less drama about office politics/relationships
- Accepts others for who they are
- Trustworthy and reliable
- On time and sticks to the schedule



Neurodivergent skills
and talents in the
workplace



No **hidden** agendas

Does not like cheating and rule
breaking

Conscientious, diligent workers

Honest and loyal

Takes the job/task/position very
seriously

Barriers for neurodivergent volunteers in the workplace/organization

- Change of plans, surprises
- Communication difficulties
- Interview skills, first impressions
- Perspective taking (blunt honesty, how others might feel...)
- Feeling overwhelmed and anxious



A toolbox of strategies to create a welcome and comfortable environment

Visuals, visuals, visuals! written guides, visual aids, or checklists

One task at a time

Break down a complicated task with several steps (like a pilot's checklist)

Demonstrate (or model) task if possible

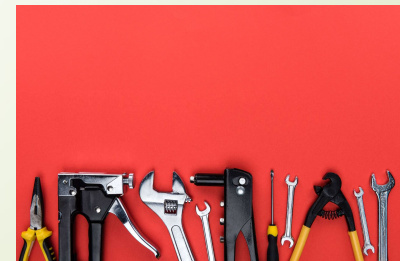
Completed example of task

Explain why the task is being completed, how does it fit in the bigger picture

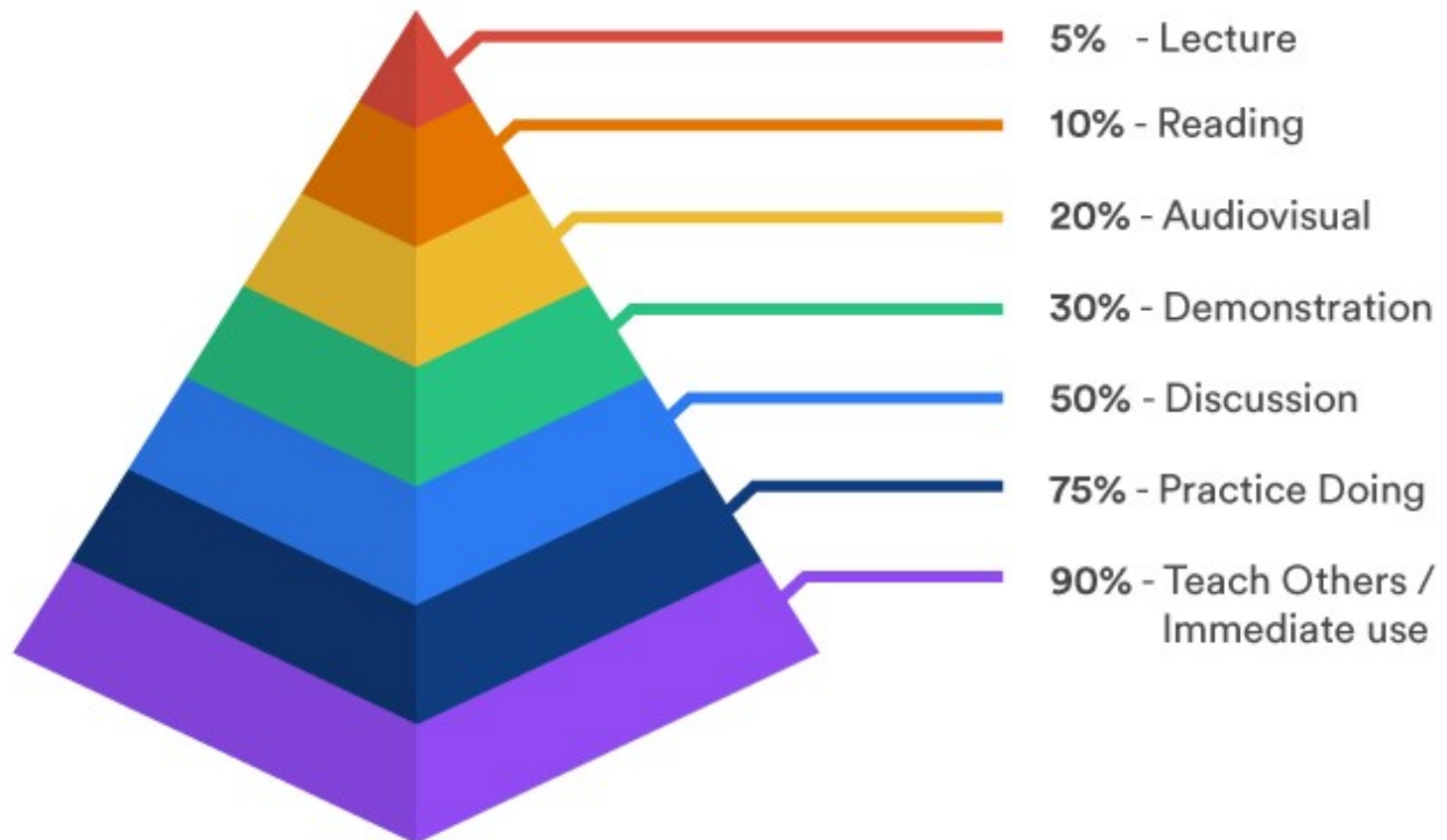
➤ Provide a visual schedule of the volunteer's time

➤ Ask for understanding of directions

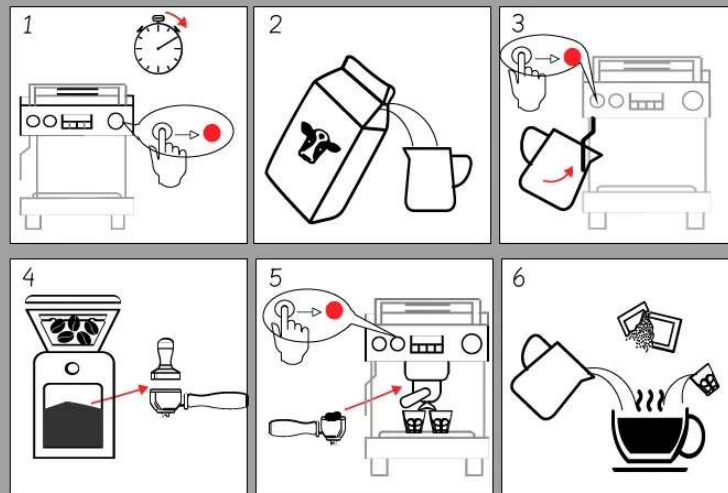
➤ Check back to see if any confusion persists



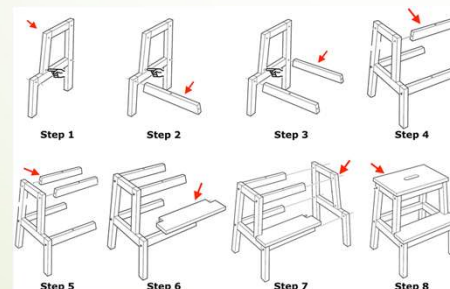
Average student retention rates



making' a Latte



Icons from the Noun Project



Kesi Parker

How to Wash Your Hands

- 1 Wet the hands with warm or cold running water



Do this for at least 20 seconds

- 2 Lather with soap **between the palms**, rubbing them together



- 3 Lather and rub the **back of the hands**



- 4 Rub **between the fingers**



- 5 Clean **under the nails**, ideally using a nail brush



- 6 **Rinse the hands** under running water



- 7 **Dry thoroughly** with a clean towel



MEDICALNEWS**TODAY**

More tools.....

- Communicate your expectations clearly i.e. what are the office/environment rules and procedures
 - Provide a list of Dos and Don'ts regarding rules and procedures
 - Praise performance and be specific about what they did well e.g. I really like how you kept the envelopes in one pile on your table
- 
- Flexibility, start and end times, placement of work
 - Focus on strengths and don't make assumptions about abilities
 - If they make a social error, gently explain what they did wrong and how they could have done it differently

Working together to create a welcoming workspace

- ▶ Ask volunteer what they **need** to feel comfortable
- ▶ Ask them if they are **feeling stress** about anything in the environment
- ▶ Provide a **quiet workspace**
- ▶ Provide a **place to relax** if volunteer is stressed
- ▶ Try to keep work location and materials in **same place**
- ▶ **Reduce** number of **people** who interact with the volunteer
- ▶ Assign a **buddy for support** and to answer questions



➤ “Tell me and I will forget.
Show me and I will remember.
Involve me and I will understand.
Step back and I will act.”



Questions?



First person:
Jessica Barker

