

**An AuDHD Learning Developer describes her first experience in an all-neurodivergent space at an NLISN event and how this has emboldened her to become an award winner.**



Hi, I'm Sarah. I am a Learning Developer at the University of Manchester Library, and I've been a member of NLISN since October 2024. I discovered the network a few months after joining the University, though I've worked in academic libraries since 2019. A colleague shared a post on Teams about NLISN's event 'Leading the Library's Neurotypicals: Neurodivergent Viewpoints'. My first thought was how pleasing the alliteration was, followed closely by the thought of, "I want to go to there!". What cemented my interest was

a phrase I'd never seen before on the event description, which said, "It is expected that attendees will all be neurodivergent." This blew my late-diagnosed AuDHD mind - I didn't even realise these kinds of spaces existed.

Walking into the room felt both powerful and overwhelming. As chatter began at my table, we skipped small talk and got to the good stuff quickly. We shared diagnosis stories, including challenges with colleagues and loved ones. Seeing people stim openly - and be encouraged to do so - allowed me to stop policing my own movements. As the day progressed, I connected deeply with these strangers and the topics we discussed, which led to a profound sense of belonging I'd been unknowingly craving. Perhaps it's no surprise, then, that this event was the catalyst for much of what I've done since to advocate for myself and others.

Some of the key messages I've taken forward are:

- Neurodivergent people should not have to explain or apologise for themselves.
- Being different in positions of power gives others permission to be different too.
- It's ok to need reasonable adjustments.

Acknowledging these truths was easy, however applying them to myself and living by them is still a work in progress. Growing up undiagnosed in a world that didn't want to accommodate me has left me battling self-doubt and anxiety. A few months before I found NLISN, I had struggled through a job application and was ultimately unsuccessful because I didn't realise it was OK to ask for reasonable adjustments. My experience left me determined to speak up, and when I applied for my current role the process was

markedly more inclusive. I was inspired to speak at NLISN's online event in March 2025, to help fellow neurodivergent applicants. I have also initiated a project to incorporate personal user manuals to aid collaboration in my team, and I'm working on an article which calls for more support in higher education for neurodivergent teachers.

In June, I was delighted to win the University of Manchester Library's EDI Initiative Award. I was nominated for my commitment to promoting inclusivity in library teaching - particularly around neurodiversity - and my willingness to challenge old ideas and explore new ones. I was proud that senior colleagues not only knew who I was, they thought I deserved recognition. I credit NLISN for showing me I'm part of something special. It's given me the confidence to follow my instincts and create change for those who have not yet found their voice.

