

'Neurodiversity in prisons: Let's start a conversation' with Scanning Pens

- Neurodiversity used to describe differences in way people's brains work. It has evolved from a focus on ADHD and autism to include people who identify as neurodiverse.
- As most people with neurological differences are undiagnosed, they often find the school environment challenging and face obstacles in finding employment.
- According to a recent report, if ADHD is recognised and managed appropriately, crime rates could lower by 32% for men and 41% for women. However, 80% of people in prison with ADHD are undiagnosed.
- Lack of programmes tailored to neurodivergence in prison, which can prevent this group from receiving the support they need for rehabilitation.

- Suggestions made:
 - A common screening tool for universal use, and for screening data to provide more accurate assessment of neurodivergence.
 - CJS agencies should work together, and with other statutory and third sector organisations, in a coordinated way.
 - Provide training and support for staff to equip them, to better support those within the prison who have neurodivergent needs.
 - Incorporate consideration for additional requirements of neurodivergent prisoners when preparing for release, including finding employment,
 - Promoting awareness and linking with local services for additional support in the community.

- Attendees discussed how these suggestions are available, but there is a lack of funding to translate them into applicable, plausible solutions. Also, Governors cutting funding and new changes with the incumbent government.

- Huge numbers of staff also neurodivergent. How do we include them, and make the environment more adaptive for everyone?
- Learners with neurodivergent needs often afraid to ask for help for fear of embarrassment (some of them have been humiliated in schooling systems).
- Attendees were all prison teachers and expressed how strongly their learners despised school and talking about anything to do with it. How can we help them to relax in these environments?

- Engaging sensory techniques.
- A study in Norway found that using linen smell diffusers helped relax learners before entering classrooms.
- One workshop attendee plays music before her students attend her classes, and noted that it becomes a bonding point, or conversation starter for many of them.
- Note that there is a need to consider those with neurodiversity when using engaging sensory techniques, because those with autism can be particularly sensitive to smell, and diffusers may affect them in classrooms.