

Series 4 Episode 6

Creating neuro-inclusive spaces in social work: A Conversation with Jenni Guthrie



[00:00:06] **Lesley:** Hello and welcome to the Portal Podcast, linking research and practice for social work. I'm your host and my name is Dr Lesley Deacon.

[00:00:13] **Sarah:** And I'm your other host and I'm Dr Sarah Lonbay. So we hope you enjoy today's episode.

Introduction to Jenni Guthrie

[00:00:25] **Sarah:** Hello everyone, we're very pleased to have Jenni Guthrie as our guest on today's episode. Jenni, if you wouldn't mind please just giving a bit of an introduction about who you are?

[00:00:35] **Jenni:** Yeah, sure. Hello, my name's Jenni. I have been a social worker for over 20 years, first in Scotland, now in England currently I'm in social work education. But I'm currently finishing a doctorate in social work looking at experiences of autistic social workers and social work students. The other thing that I do, I do a lot of things actually, funnily enough, is I do training for social work organisations and consultancy through my company called Neuro Inclusive Solutions, with my colleague, Florence Smith. And I guess the key thing at this point to say is that I am a multiple-neurodivergent person and, I guess my leading identity at the moment is I'm autistic. So the thing that I do outside of work, because obviously I have loads of free time, is I'm a chair of trustees for an autistic-led charity called Autistic Parents UK. I'm also a parent to three young people as well, which I've factored into a lot of my thinking, I think.

[00:02:11] **Sarah:** Thank you for that introduction, and it's great to meet you today.

A profession unaware: The research gap about autistic social worker

[00:02:14] **Lesley:** Thanks, Jenni. Yeah, I'm interested in, because for you, some of the work that you're looking at is around those social work experiences, like autistic social workers. Could you tell us a bit about what specifically have you been exploring about those experiences? And what are you finding?

[00:02:35] **Jenni:** Yeah. What am I finding? A lot of things. I guess the first thing is that there's very little written about this in social work research. So there's some research, some recent research, but not a lot to be fair, around social workers working with autistic people as people who would access a service. There's a lot more on children, more in relation to an educational context. So, there is a real gap, there's a real gap in the literature and the knowledge base, and I was really curious about how that would impact social work. When we're thinking about it's a time when we're really keen to recruit and retain social workers. We want a real good, robust, if you like, profession that's got a real array of skills and strengths and experiences, and particularly lived experience of issues that are really relevant and present for people who access social work services. So I was curious as to why there seemed to be, I don't know, it just felt like it was unnoticed. It was just kind of a hidden aspect that people just didn't really acknowledge, except when things went wrong. So I guess another thing to say that led me into all of this was being part of the initial beginnings of a BASW, British Association of Social Workers, special interest group for neurodivergent social workers that was started by Deb Solomon, because she couldn't find any spaces or groups for people who identified as neurodivergent within the social work profession. And from that, I then set up a student and newly qualified group, and people's narratives from that was that there was a dominant discourse of failure associated particularly around, autism, but I think there were very similar things relating to dyslexia, ADHD, but also acquired neurodivergence. So I was really curious as to what the experiences might actually be and try and capture that in some form of research.

From personal risk to validating a community

[00:05:08] **Jenni:** So I've done a few things, but also a key thing that I wanted to do, because I was really aware that if you are autistic in social work, there's a real sense of, if I put myself out there, I'm kind of placing myself at risk. So I thought if I'm going to do anything, what I need to do is put myself in there. So my first paper was a reflexive account of my own experiences of being an autistic social worker, and that felt so risky, I have to say, because I was doing it in a slightly different way. I was using analogy to describe, and then I was doing that in a way that I felt was a bit of an autistic approach to

communication, through a formal publication, to try and connect with people who might not get, well certainly my autistic experience, I can't speak for everybody, can I? But what that might mean, and try and tie in some kind of key concepts that are really beneficial or useful or essential for social workers to know, to understand with regards to autism more generally. And then tie that into the social work context. So I mean it was a little bit of a, you know, I don't know what, humble brag? And kind of saying, actually, you know, you kind of *need* people who are autistic in social work. Because we've got some pretty good skill sets going on that actually align beautifully with social work ethics and values. So I guess it was that, that's what set it off, and from there not only did I find that I had a lot of people contacting me, because they felt seen and validated, and it just indicated to me that there are a lot more people in social work, and bearing in mind I was doing this within an English context, and I was getting this from people in England *and beyond*. And I just felt that this was something that was definitely felt, it needed to be explored more, and it needed to be *pinned down* in research. You know, I write blogs and things like that, but I'm also acutely aware of publication privilege and just how the different types of knowledge are regarded in terms of validity. So I was like, no, we need to get more into the research sphere. So the couple of bits of research that I've done, one that I'd quite like to talk about that's involved some, it was co-created and co-produced with neurodivergent students, social work students, and newly qualified social workers, around community spaces. And the other one is one that I'm currently doing, and it's looking at the experiences of practice-based assessment of autistic trainee social workers.

[00:08:29] **Lesley:** So I just think that's really interesting, because you're looking at the social workers themselves, and I think that's what's quite interesting for the podcast. Because mostly it's been about the people with... the lived experience is still the same in that sense, but they weren't looking at the social work role, we were largely looking at people who use the services and their experiences. So I suppose that's the bit, for me, that I'm quite interested in Jenni, because my experience is I was a social worker, and I was obviously an autistic social worker, but I didn't know I was. And I just wonder is there, with the research that you're doing, are you doing it with people with diagnosis or identify as having traits? And how do you factor in the fact that there are lots of us without the knowledge that we are autistic?

The challenge of identification: Diagnosis as a privilege

[00:09:23] **Jenni:** So you read stuff that says diagnosis is a privilege, and it really is. It's a privilege around your access to resources, which includes finances, your geographical location, how you are perceived by others, and that includes other minoritised identities, and that kind of "gatekeeping" sense of "we don't deem you of the right kind of behaviour, or whatever, to go forward for assessment, we're just going to decide that your behaviour is something else", usually quite negative. And what I have found, over this time that I've been exploring this that there's a lot of people that will come in to higher education definitely, but in terms of social work, because we do a lot of reflexivity, don't we? We encourage people to really explore who they are anyway. And there's that kind of realisation, they've maybe kind of tentatively explored, and then we get ourselves into training to be a social worker, which is an incredibly vulnerable place to be, right? Because we are totally, you know, casting a critical eye over who we are. And this is when people are going, "hang on a minute...". And I'm really struggling with the, because I'm in master's level education, so it's the critical analysis, reflexivity elements, that I need to demonstrate academically and in practice. Yeah. And oh, hang on a minute, this is feeling very different, and something that I might have been able to know that there was difficulties or barriers or whatever as a child, or even in further education, but actually getting to that point, there's something that's not quite sitting with where everybody expects me to be. So you're getting a lot of people really questioning round about that point, and all of these spaces that are created for students, and so we consciously have said, you can be questioning, you don't need to have a diagnosis. And I've been very adamant in my research that that is the same, otherwise we are excluding voices that really need to be heard. Yeah, so absolutely, and I do think there is a difference, in how there are different things to consider, based on how aware you are of your own neurodivergent identity. So for myself, I've spent a long time unpicking and exploring, and I feel like I'm in a place where I understand it, or I *hope* I understand it, certainly at this point in time, in some depth. Whereas if you're just starting out, you're just exploring this identity, and if you're just also starting out in social work, that's a lot to unpick, isn't it? And a lot of change. So there's different needs perhaps that crop up, whether you've been diagnosed previously and can have had time to work out who you are in terms of neurodivergence, or someone who's just finding themselves at that point in time.

[00:12:58] **Sarah:** Yeah. Do you have a sense, Jenni, of the prevalence in social work? You know, how many people are we talking about? I know you said

there isn't much research, so probably there isn't an answer to this question, but...

[00:13:12] **Jenni:** There isn't an answer, but if we say we've got, in terms of neurodivergence, so we say that we've got over 200 members in the special interest group, and it's one of the biggest groups, biggest special interest groups that BASW has.

[00:13:26] **Sarah:** Wow, yeah.

[00:13:27] **Jenni:** Yeah. I think that talks to neurodivergence anyway, which is quite a broad church, isn't it? However, our regulators do not record data, statistically or otherwise, in relation to, well, disability. I'm still to see validated stats around how many disabled social workers we have. But in terms of neurodivergent, and particularly autism, we don't have that information. We do know that there's more autistic people coming into higher education, as well. But particularly in relation to social work, this is, it's an unknown. You're kind of grasping at a vague number, which I can't really, I can't do, you know?

[00:14:18] **Sarah:** Yeah. Yeah, I thought that your answer might be something along those lines, but I thought I'd ask anyway just in case. And so can you tell us a bit more about the research that you've been doing around social workers in particular then?

Researching safe spaces: A collaborative auto ethnography

[00:14:32] **Jenni:** Yeah, so if I can talk a little bit about the community space one, because that one is completed. So, in the organisation, my organisation that I'm employed in, we set up a virtual space for neurodivergent students and newly qualified social workers, just so they had somewhere to go. People were all in different local authorities, so it was chosen to be online because it was more accessible, and we'd set it up and it had been going for a while, and we also chose that a staff member would facilitate, because we wanted to make it a space that people felt they could at least try out. So anybody who had that sense of, I don't want other people to know, you know, there's an element of confidentiality, but also an element of boundaries. But we were kind of like, how do we know that this is effective? You know, is this useful? Is it doing what it's meant to be doing? So it came from, I had the idea and it came from a discussion with some of the regular members of the space, and we decided that we wanted to research that. So we did a collaborative

autoethnography that involved all of us. And we thought, well, you know, we like to be creative, why don't we try and find a way that works for all of us rather than trying to adhere to a specific, more linear methodology. So we were really responding to, I guess, our identities and how we situated knowledge, so what knowledge meant for us. So a real key thing about this was that I was really aware that there was a power imbalance, and usually for autoethnographies, you can have these discussions and you don't really need to seek ethical approval, but I was really aware that I was a staff member and I was working with students and with social workers who were newly qualified. So there was definitely a power imbalance, and I had suggested the project, so I sought ethical approval, which I got. But what we did from the very beginning, all the way through, is we did everything together, we agreed the process, we worked through how we wanted to work, so we had that established right from the beginning, and we wanted to model how we were doing the community space in our approach at the same time. So it was very much *in* the experience, if you like. So we took our information, our data, from our own reflections of around six months of community space meetings, so setting them up and then being in there. So if there were other people in there, they were made aware of that, but we focused on only ours. And what we found was, in the end, the people who were involved were the people who were in as a regular thing anyway, we had a few people who gave consent to have their discussions reflected on, but didn't want to be part of the researcher process. So they came in and did that, and we've acknowledged them definitely. And I had a co-facilitator as well who then went off, after we had done these sessions, and went all the way to Australia. So it got harder for her to remain involved. But again, they provided consent for all of that. So we were just really, really careful about who we were involving and maintaining that sense of safety, because that was the priority that was being raised by all of us right from the beginning.

Our reflections, we did our own individual reflections, and then what we did was we did some reflexive thematic analysis on our own reflections. What we then did was we shared our reflections, so everybody got somebody else's, so you got one other person's set of reflections, and then you collated your own thematic analysis, reflexive thematic analysis, around those. And then what we did was we came together and we looked at this collectively to see what the recurring themes were, whether there were any outliers, and anything else that we wanted to do. We were acutely aware that our biographical data was also relevant, and certainly came up in particular aspects that we were discussing. So it was a very immersive process, I think, it felt very collaborative.

It took a long time, we needed a lot of patience, and I think one of the things that I found from doing this was a whole bunch of neurodivergent people being very reflexive and also working as social workers is very difficult to contain and have timescales for, you know? So we gave ourselves grace in terms of how long this was going to take, you know? That worked, I think, but also we were just really, I guess, receptive to the demands that we were all experiencing all in different ways, and how our needs responded to that. So it was a very, empathic, respectful process, and something that we included in our reflections as we went. So we were looking at the process, we were looking at how we set the space up, we were looking at the expectations of the space by neurodivergent, early career social workers, we'll call it that, and then what the implications were, so, you know, what did we find from that?

[00:21:42] **Sarah:** And what did you find then? What were the important messages from this process?

Key findings: The need for valued, neuro-affirming support

[00:21:47] **Jenni:** Yeah, we found that this was a really accessible, methodological approach that took into consideration people of different experiences in terms of both research and practice. Our key findings were that spaces were considered incredibly valuable. It was a space of safety, but it also was strongly felt that these should be supported and valued by organisations in which they were placed. So it couldn't just be an extra piece of work for someone or, you know, a bit of time added on or like an afterthought. This had to be invested in and valued and really held by senior management within organisations. That support for the facilitator was crucial, because there was a lot of emotive content that was coming into the space, and whilst the space was very good in terms of peer support, the identity of the facilitator was both member of the group and kind of "boundary keeper" of the group, which took a lot of emotional energy and things like that. So this was something that needed to be carefully thought about, about who would facilitate. And it was very clear that it needed to be someone who was neurodivergent for that space to remain safe. So there were some clear organisational recommendations for setting up spaces, but the space was valuable. That was the overriding thing. And from that, the issues discussed were around being seen as professional within placements and the workplace, about neurodivergence being misunderstood and misapplied in social work workspaces, that there was very few other kinds of spaces or safe areas for people who, especially people who were questioning their identity, and that

there was high experiences of ableism, and for people who were racialized as black, brown, they also experienced the kind of conflation of racism and ableism. So there were some really strong themes that came through with that, to make us think about considerations both for placements and in the workplace.

[00:24:36] **Sarah:** Yeah. So a lot came out of that work.

[00:24:39] **Jenni:** A large amount, yeah.

The strengths and skills of autistic professionals

[00:24:41] **Sarah:** Can I take you back to something you said earlier, which follows on from this? Because you made a comment about, I can't remember if you said autistic social workers or neurodivergent social workers, but you made a comment about how some of the skills and traits align really well with the social work role. And then you've just started talking about some of the challenges that these social workers experience. So could you say a little bit more about both of those things?

[00:25:06] **Jenni:** Absolutely. So there's very much, I mean the space definitely held a lot of very committed people to social justice and social work, so anti-oppressive social work, absolutely. Fairness, respect, all of those kind of values we really value in social worker are held in high regard, certainly with my co-researchers and I, and it's something that's a theme through autism and neurodiversity research, and in other professions as well. So autistic doctors have found that as well, for example, and, I know there's research being done with, police officers too, so there's a continuity around that kind of anti-oppressive values, social justice values, empathy towards each other, really being curious to understand other people. And then also that sense of, I want to understand an issue or a difficulty, I want to find what is going on here. And again, I speak to this in other places, but that kind of getting into the detail and unpicking to find, I mean for some it's patterns I guess, for others it's just making sense of, so you're making sense of the data. Yeah we're amazing analysts, I think, you know, she said as a general statement, but whether that's numerically, whether that's linguistically, observational, some of us are fantastic in terms of our observations. Because that's what we've done to work out what other people are meaning or doing. So putting that into a social work context is fantastic. But I think also engaging with other people's traumatic experiences. You know, if you are used to being on alert for not being seen as

good enough, you know, so you're always having to make sure that you are doing what you need to do, saying what you need to say. In some places that's called masking, in others it's more around trauma response, I suppose that's what masking is, but what I'm trying to say is different neurodivergences might see that slightly different. But there is very much a shared view of "I'm going to really kind of unpick what you're doing to work out what it is that you're meaning". So a lot of that really falls into fantastic social work skills in terms of problem solving, that real kind of critical analysis, curiosity, just staying with the data until you're making sense of it, but also then trying to find a solution so you're not just leaving it there. And some of us are definitely task initiators more than task finishers, but that drive, that motivation to really seek to understand, I think, is absolutely crucial. And that came through in this research, and it also has come through in other research as well.

[00:28:48] **Sarah:** Thank you for that.

Compounded challenges: Autistic burnout versus social work burnout

[00:28:49] **Lesley:** Did you find that, I just wonder about if there's anything that you saw between the relationship with the burnout issues in social work, and then obviously with especially neurodivergent people and experiences of burnout, because I was thinking what you were saying is that the thing about understanding people is autistic people, we don't get a shortcut. It's you have to go through every single thing to learn it. Which makes you better at it, in some respects, but also there is a toll, there is a consequence to that. I was wondering if anything had come through on that.

[00:29:21] **Jenni:** So I guess just the exhausting experiences of being minimised, or ignored in terms of need and support, a sense of exhaustion is also something, a theme that is coming through in the research that I'm currently doing, and of frustration, and that sense of we're taught one thing and we experience another. So, you know, we're taught anti-oppressive practice, and we're not experiencing that in our placement or in our workplace when it comes to the social worker. You know, when we apply our values and ethics and approaches to the people that we're working with, we're not really thinking about the people we're working with also being our colleagues. And that sense of, I talk about invisibility, but actually it's not, it's not hidden, I would argue, being neurodivergent in the workplace, you're not hidden, you're just *unseen*.

[00:30:26] **Lesley:** Yeah.

[00:30:26] **Jenni:** And there's a big difference. So I think that sense of having to move to somebody else's perceptions of what is "good enough practice" when you know you can also deliver that in a way that is more *you*, and then also being very guarded about "please don't see me as incompetent, because that's a message that you've got from school or from wherever, coupled with, I mean even if you've got the nicest practice educator in the world, if you've come into this space with that, with those messages that are still sitting in you, internally, and then you hear language talking about, say, autistic people that are accessing services and and it's quite pathologising or dismissive, you're right back there. So even though you've got a supportive relationship with your practice educator, you're now wary of your team. And you're having to navigate all of that on a day-to-day basis. But autistic burnout is different from social work burnout, and I think whilst I don't *know* if that's going to come out in the research that I'm currently doing, and it wasn't a particular theme in the community space one, but it is when talking anecdotally with other social workers, that sense of, you know, when my sensory overload is becoming too much to bear, and because I'm not getting an understanding within my workplace it's still continuing, or people are dismissing my trauma as something that's quite minimal, then that perpetual everydayness of experiencing, and knowing that you're going to come in and experience that before you even started doing the social work, means you're already there. So I would actually argue that managing the work that is involved with the people that you're working with who are accessing the services is probably more manageable, it makes more sense, you've got more context, you can have those discussions, than the workplace itself. Or the expectations around the workplace. So I would argue we probably, and this is just my hypothesis and nothing really to back it up, would hit autistic burnout, as an autistic person, before we would hit social work burnout.

[00:33:15] **Lesley:** Yeah, I see what you mean. Because I don't think people fully understand the elements of the sensory experience of the actual workplace, and how much energy is taken from you before you even begin the actual work. I think that bit's not seen, I think it'd be interesting to have that pulled out more and have a wider understanding of that. Because the tacit rules of it are so complex, and they're not there and they're not written, and the expectations are there though, and it's really concerning for me that you've got these potentially amazing practitioners that are just getting pushed into,

my experience is seeing them being pushed into disciplinary elements and action plans and things like that. Did that come through with those people?

[00:34:14] **Jenni:** Yeah, that misunderstanding. And I think that's, for me, that's crucial, and that's coming through in everything that I'm currently doing as well. And it's been really interesting trying to get people who are not autistic to become part of my research. So my recruitment was a very interesting experience, for my current study. So I was looking for autistic newly qualified social workers, because I didn't want to have participants who were *in* the experiences, so to speak, you know, there's a relative amount of distance. And I was also looking for practice educators. Now, I just reached out for practice educators, right? So I was recruiting them, and so I didn't specify whether they needed to be autistic or not. And what I found was, I got an okay response, but what I found was that trying to get people who didn't have that close proximity to autism was really difficult. So I got more practice educators who were interested in the topic generally, and those practice educators either were because they worked in a service that was specifically about usually autistic adults, or they currently had an autistic student, or they had a family member, an immediate family member, who was autistic. The first phase of my study was a questionnaire, a survey-based questionnaire, for practice educators to try and gauge an understanding of *acceptance* of autism, that also kind of explored the workplace as well. And interestingly, and I've not really analysed it yet, but my surface themes were very much that we had a lot of sitting on the fence. You know, that people were like not very strongly leaning one way or to the other. And I offered an option at the end to see whether practice educators wanted to give any feedback on it, and not a lot did, but a couple had said, "I don't know anything about this, I was just guessing". So what I'm finding is that level of understanding is really basic, if not non-existent, and particularly if you are not working in that area, or you don't expect it to be a thing, basically.

[00:37:15] **Sarah:** Yeah. Which is a problem given how you started the conversation, when we were talking about social workers who are themselves neurodivergent. So that knowledge about neurodivergence and things is quite low, I think. I mean, based on all of the things you've talked about so far, do you have key recommendations for social workers, or perhaps more broadly than that for the regulators or anyone else, that's come out of this work?

[00:37:43] **Jenni:** I've got so many messages.

[00:37:45] **Sarah:** Brilliant, we want to hear them all.

A pervasive stigma: Separating autism from risk

[00:37:48] **Jenni:** One of the things is, the crucial thing that we need to do is we need to separate autism and risk. Risk seems to be a dominant discourse that kind of underpins, whether overtly or covertly. One of my colleagues, my co-researcher colleagues in the previous piece of research that I talked about, was asked why when they had disclosed that they were autistic, had been asked why that hadn't come up on their DBS check.

[00:38:17] **Lesley:** Ooh!

[00:38:18] **Jenni:** You know?

[00:38:19] **Sarah:** I was going to ask, what do you mean by separating autism and risk? So it's being seen as inherently a risk?

[00:38:28] **Jenni:** Yes.

[00:38:29] **Sarah:** To who and in what way?

[00:38:31] **Jenni:** Well, who knows? Who knows? But it's definitely seen as something that people immediately start thinking about in through a kind of lens of concern, as opposed to a lens of curiosity.

[00:38:48] **Lesley:** I think people get very panicky and concerned about the risk that an autistic person poses to others. Somehow it's such a deficit perspective that, you know, I know it's not as simple as this, but that constant battle with have we got the ability to show empathy, which I know when you're in academic circles and you read about it, you know all of that has been there for a long time. But it's not out there in practice environments, and it isn't understood. And therefore it's almost, to me, that people perceive autistic people is that there is no emotion and there's no ability to have meaningful relationships.

[00:39:29] **Sarah:** So the concern is that you are not going to be able to relate to the people that you're working with?

[00:39:32] **Lesley:** Yeah. So you'll be a risk to those people.

[00:39:35] **Jenni:** Yeah. So you won't pick up on concerns, you won't be able to be work relationally with people, or there might be things that are inherent with you that mean you're not able to do the job, whatever it is. Who knows? I mean, that's the thing. It's never drilled down to in anything, but it's there. It's a sense that is there. And you just need language that reinforces that, and people often, I guess, don't intentionally come to that, although, you know, that example absolutely does. I had somebody say to me that the increase in students coming through is because more people are getting vaccinated. I had a head of CAMHS tell me, when I was in practice, when I was asking about getting an autistic social worker for this young person who wasn't engaging with anybody, and I was the manager then, and I had somebody in mind, this was the thing, and she turned to me and she said, "we both know there's no such thing as an autistic social worker". I thought, well, your observations, your assessment skills are shocking if you haven't picked me up yet! But that's it. There's this prevalent kind of discourse, it kicks about, that it has still not gone. And in social work we are very behind when it comes to that, I think, as a profession. So it needs to come from the regulator or key organisations, first and foremost I think, about, well two things. One, I think they should be encouraging research in it, or a very strong knowledge base and very strong training around autism specifically. because there does seem to be more stigma around being risky or not being able to do things, more than say dyslexia, which comes with its own misconceptions and discrimination, but there's something inherently "unsafe", a feeling of being "unsafe" when it comes to people talking about autism, and especially male autistics. So there's something that, I mean I'm fascinated by it, I would really like to explore that more. But our regulator doesn't know how many autistic people there are, and one of the reasons for that is because autistic people will not tell them they are autistic. So we need to be able to see the people at the top, the people who are in charge, and the people who will control the policy, the training, the legislation, all of these kind of governance things, very clearly saying this is a welcoming profession for people who think and respond to the world differently. And then from autism, branching that out to other neurodivergence. I mean, acquired neurodivergence is one that *nobody* talks about. And my colleagues who have schizophrenia, for example, or have had stroke, or other form of brain injury, not only stroke, they're definitely out on a limb if there aren't any spaces created, neurodivergent spaces, for them. Also due to stigma around competence. So yeah.

I have to really clarify because I'm very aware I said dyslexia was something that... I have colleagues who are dyslexic and they would probably be shouting

at me right now going, "we are just as relevant!" Absolutely that's not what I meant, I just meant there are different elements of stigma that seem to be attached to different neurodivergent identities, which I find fascinating, and all of that comes from our social construction around what competence is and what it looks like, and what safety is.

[00:43:37] **Lesley:** Yeah, because there will be different ones around ADHD as well. There's a nuance in it and the neurotype element is there, but there are different experiences around the way that the barriers and challenges that are placed before them are put. And then obviously you have the complication that there's very few of us that are just one neurodivergence, we're usually quite a mixture. And so then you've got the complication of that, and it's just not understood. I think that it's wonderful what's happening within a pocket of academia. It's not across though. But I think going back to like half an hour ago or something, I wrote down the fact that you did it as collaborative autoethnography, which is something I've used as well, but I'm in amongst some researchers and they're going, "what are you talking about? What is this approach that you're discussing?" Because there's a whole new area emerging where it's like, well, those other approaches don't work, we need to use something different. And I think that's what I like, that it's starting to come out a bit more. And it does need some of us to be a bit more outspoken in order to do that and to get it known, really.

[00:44:53] **Sarah:** Well, thank you. I'm conscious of the time and how long we've been speaking for, and you definitely have a chance to tell us anything more that you haven't said that you wanted to say. But before that, can we ask a final question, which is, if you could make any change to the lives of neurodivergent people, what would it be and why?

[00:45:16] **Jenni:** Oh gosh, that's a huge question.

[00:45:19] **Sarah:** Yes, I know.

[00:45:21] **Lesley:** You're thinking, "just one? Just one thing??"

[00:45:23] **Jenni:** I think it's that overarching attitude and value base from everybody else, which is respect who we are, don't place yourself as the expert, and come meet us with curiosity, and humility, and that will be fine.

[00:45:47] **Sarah:** Thank you. Thank you so much. I think it sounds incredible what you're doing, the space that's been created and the value of that for people. So I hope you're able to continue with that and get it embedded more widely, because it sounds like such a good piece of work.

[00:46:00] **Jenni:** Yeah, thank you.

[00:46:01] **Lesley:** Thank you.

Outro

[00:46:02] **Sarah:** You have been listening to the Portal Podcast, linking research and practice for social work with me, Dr Sarah Lonbay.

[00:46:09] **Lesley:** And Dr Lesley Deacon. And this was funded by the University of Sunderland, edited by Paperghosts, and our theme music is called, *Together We're Stronger* by All Music Seven.

[00:46:19] **Sarah:** And don't forget that you can find a full transcript of today's podcast and links and extra information in our show notes. So anything you want to follow up from what you've heard today, check out there and you should find some useful extra resources.

See you all next time.

[00:46:34] **Lesley:** Bye.