NEURODIVERSITY AWARENESS TRAINING PROGRAMME: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT 2024

PUNUKA FOUNDATION

Who We Are:

Because of the neglect and challenges faced by neurodiverse individuals, especially those below the age of 14, and the continuous rise of the youth population in Nigeria and Africa, we work in disadvantaged communities to help neurodiverse children and disadvantaged youths gain the skills, tools, and support they need to lead themselves effectively and contribute meaningfully to society, in order to create lasting social impact for future generations.

Our Vision:

Our vision is to create a world where every child with a disability has equal opportunities and access to quality care and support. We envision a society that embraces and celebrates the unique abilities of these children and youths, fostering an inclusive and accepting environment that allows everyone to thrive.

Our Mission:

Our mission is to provide comprehensive and compassionate care for children with special needs through the childcare centre projects; to give young people a reason to pursue their dream and contribute positively to society through our youth development programmes.

Disclaimer:

Executive Summary

Neurodiversity Awareness Training Programme: A Beginner's Guide aimed to enhance understanding and practical application of inclusive strategies among caregivers, educators, therapists, and parents. The baseline survey identified significant knowledge gaps and unconscious biases towards neurodiversity, while the endline survey revealed marked improvements in participants' understanding, confidence, and readiness to support neurodiverse individuals. This report evaluates the program's impact, highlights key findings, and offers recommendations for future iterations.

Background

The Neurodiversity Awareness Training Program, an initiative of Punuka Foundation, was developed to address the lack of understanding, stigma, and inadequate support for neurodiverse individuals. The program seeks to create a society that embraces neurodiversity by equipping stakeholders with the knowledge and skills to foster inclusivity. The Neurodiversity Awareness Training: A Beginner's Guide project is borne out of the recognition that neurodiversity is a natural aspect of human experience. Neurodiverse individuals, comprising approximately 1 in 5 people worldwide, have conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), cerebral palsy, down syndrome attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia, Tourette Syndrome, or other neurological differences. Despite the prevalence of neurodiversity, a significant gap in understanding and awareness persists, leading to stigma, exclusion, and inequality.
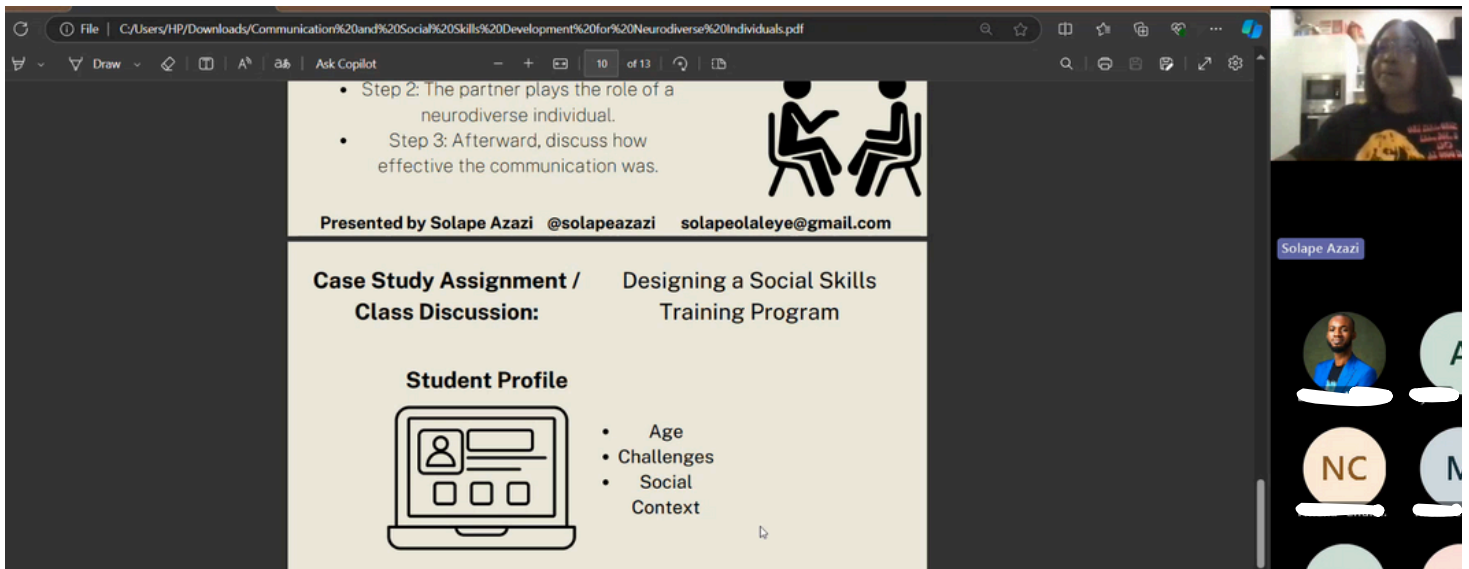
This can have far-reaching consequences, including social isolation and marginalization, limited access to education and employment opportunities, inadequate support and accommodations, and unaddressed mental health concerns.

To address these challenges, Punuka Foundation launched the Neurodiversity Awareness Training: Beginner's Guide project. This initiative aims to promote inclusivity and acceptance by providing education and resources to support neurodiverse individuals. The project's primary goals are to increase awareness and understanding of neurodiversity among participants, reduce stigma and stereotypes associated with neurodiverse conditions, equip participants with strategies to support and accommodate neurodiverse individuals, and foster an inclusive and accepting environment.

By achieving these goals, the project aspires to contribute to a more inclusive and supportive society for neurodiverse individuals, where they can thrive and reach their full potential
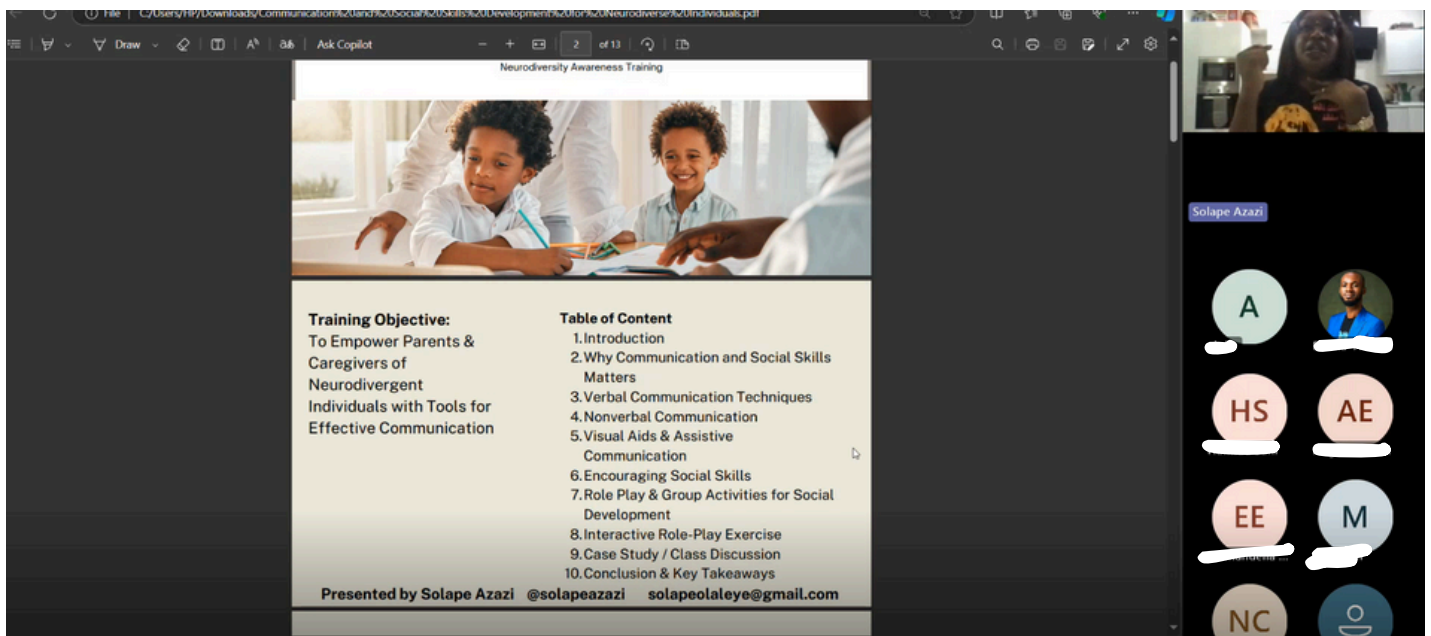
Purpose of the Evaluation

The baseline report established participants' pre-training levels of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours regarding neurodiversity, serving as a benchmark for program development and impact assessment. The endline report measured progress and short-term outcomes, providing insights into the training's effectiveness and areas for improvement.

Scope of the Evaluation

This evaluation compares baseline and endline data, focusing on participant demographics, pre- and post-training confidence, knowledge application, and program satisfaction. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to analyze data from surveys and focus group discussions.

Goal

To equip educators, therapists, caregivers, and parents with the knowledge and skills necessary to support neurodiverse children effectively to foster an inclusive and supportive environment.

Project Objectives

1. To help participants understand neurodiversity and the unique needs of neurodiverse children.
2. To teach useful tools and strategies to support the development of neurodiverse children.
3. To guide participants to create welcoming spaces where neurodiverse children can thrive.

Target Population

The program targeted educators, caregivers, therapists, and parents of neurodiverse individuals, with participants drawn from Nigeria and Ghana.

Expected Outcomes

- Enhanced understanding of neurodiverse conditions among participants.
- Implementation of inclusive education strategies in homes, communities, and educational settings.

Evaluation Methodology

Data Collection:

- Baseline: Surveys and focus group discussions.
- Endline: Pre- and post-training surveys and feedback forms.

Tools:

- Open-ended questions for qualitative insights.
- Excel for quantitative data analysis.

Limitations:

- Small sample size limits generalizability
- Potential response biases in self-reported data.
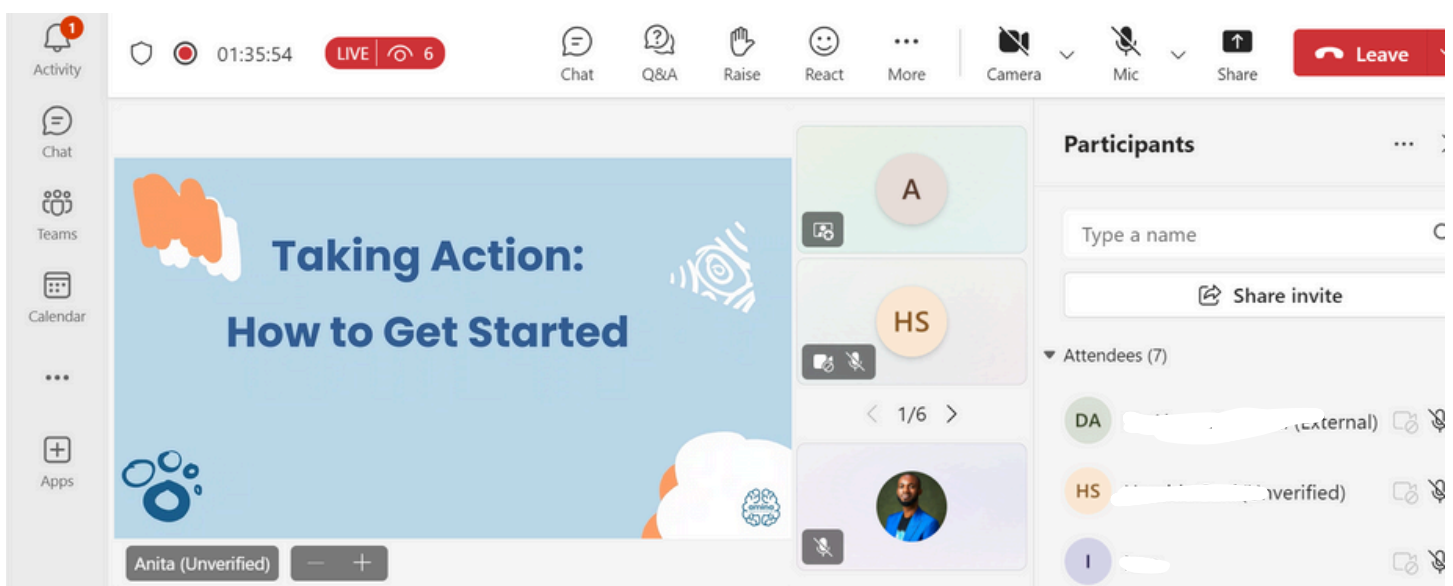
Key Findings

The baseline study revealed that participants had a limited understanding of neurodiversity, its effects, and the experiences of neurodiverse individuals. Additionally, some participants were unaware of the prevalence of neurodiverse conditions, such as Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, and Tourette's Syndrome. Participants also held stereotypes and stigmatizing views about neurodiverse individuals, which can impact their interactions and inclusivity. Furthermore, the study identified gaps in knowledge regarding neurodiverse conditions, strategies for supporting neurodiverse individuals, accommodations, and resources available.

Also, participants exhibited unconscious bias towards neurodiverse individuals, which can impact their behaviours and decision-making. Many participants felt uncertain about how to support neurodiverse children or clients and expressed a desire to learn more about neurodiversity and create a more inclusive environment. Despite these challenges, participants recognized the importance of neurodiversity awareness in their personal and professional lives. Overall, the baseline study highlighted the need for education, awareness, and skill-building to promote inclusivity and support for neurodiverse individuals. The training program can address these gaps and provide a solid foundation for participants to become more aware, accepting, and supportive of neurodiversity.

The endline survey highlighted marked improvements across various dimensions. Participants reported a significant increase in confidence levels for identifying neurodiverse traits, managing challenging behaviours, and implementing inclusive strategies. Familiarity with and use of tools such as Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) rose notably, with many participants incorporating these strategies into their daily practices. Collaboration among stakeholders—caregivers, educators, and therapists—improved, fostering a more supportive environment. Satisfaction levels were high, with most participants feeling that the training met or exceeded their objectives. These results demonstrate the program's success in addressing knowledge gaps, reducing stigmatizing views, and empowering participants to support neurodiverse individuals effectively.

Demography

A baseline survey was conducted to gather insights from participants interested in the Neurodiversity Awareness Training program. The survey received 17 responses, with the majority being female (14 out of 17 participants). While the endline survey conducted had 13 participants with the majority still being female (11 out of 13 participants).
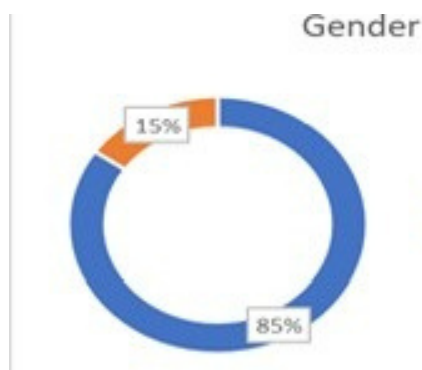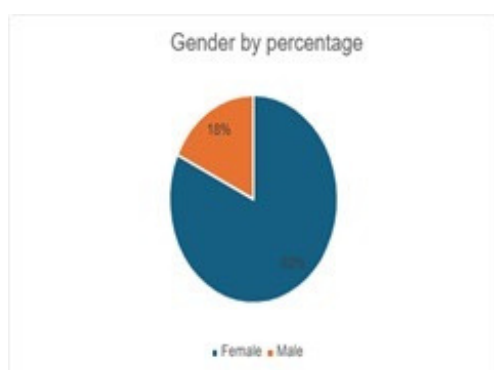
The age distribution showed an even split, with 8 participants aged 36 years and above, while 9 were between 18 and 35 years old at the baseline. Meanwhile, in the endline, 1 aged 18–24, 6 aged 25–34, 6 aged 35+.
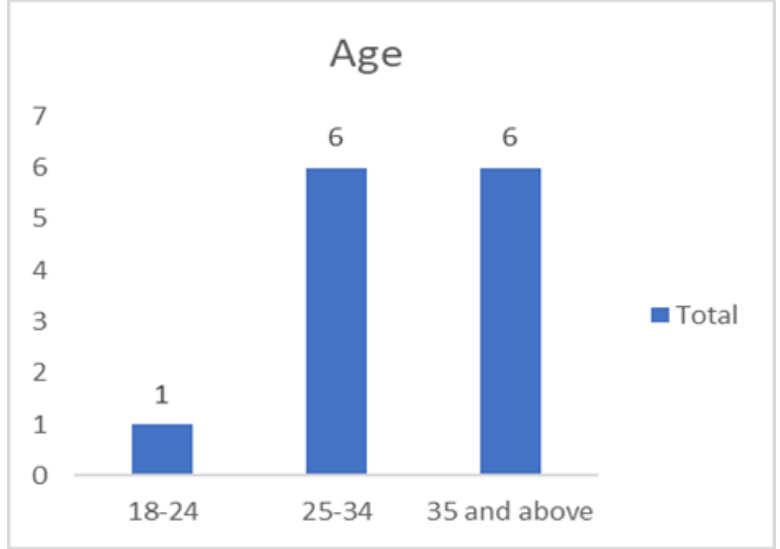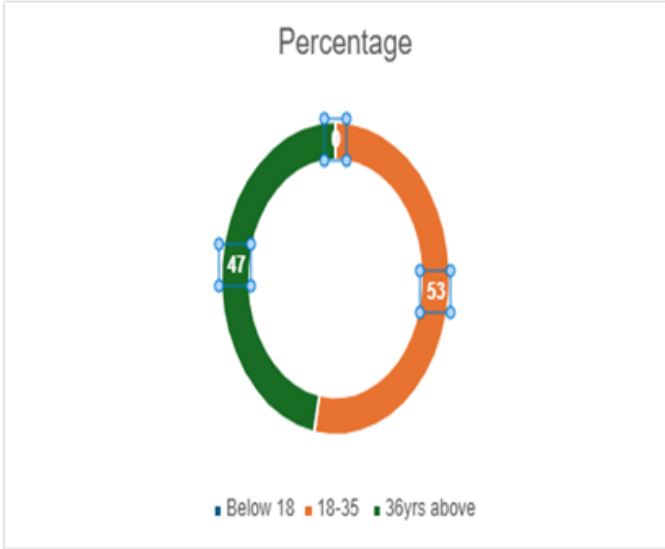
In terms of professional backgrounds, at the baseline, 4 participants identified as educators, 4 as caregivers, 4 as therapists, and 5 were parents of neurodiverse children. While 5 participants identified as parents of neurodiverse, 3 as caregivers, 2 as educators, 2 as therapists at the endline.
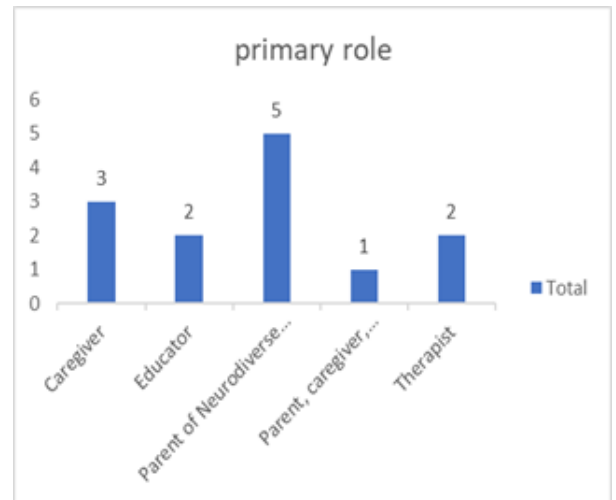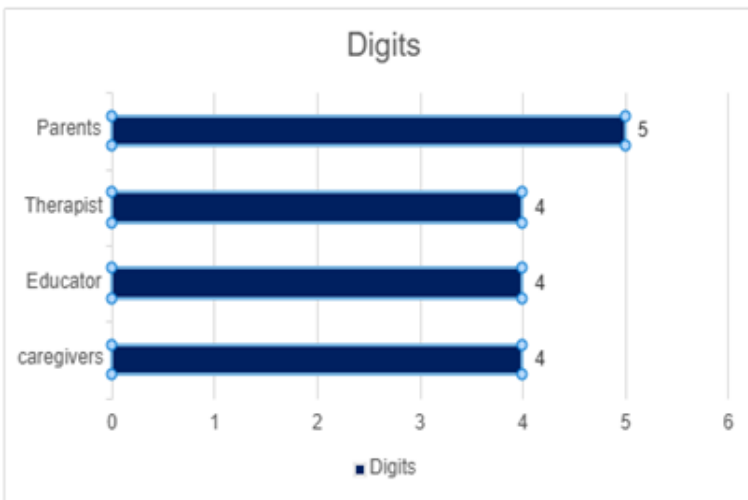
All respondents reside in urban areas in both surveys, with the majority being Nigerians and two from Ghana.

Urban: 17 (100%)
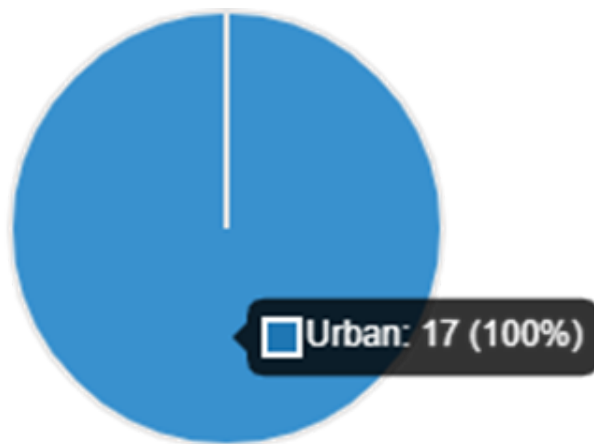
When it comes to education, 11 participants hold a bachelor's degree, while 6 possess a master's degree. Regarding their daily interactions with neurodiverse individuals, 8 participants reported engaging with 0-5 individuals daily, while 1 interacted with over 50 individuals, and 7 engaged with 5-20 neurodiverse individuals each day.

Number of Interactions

Educational qualification
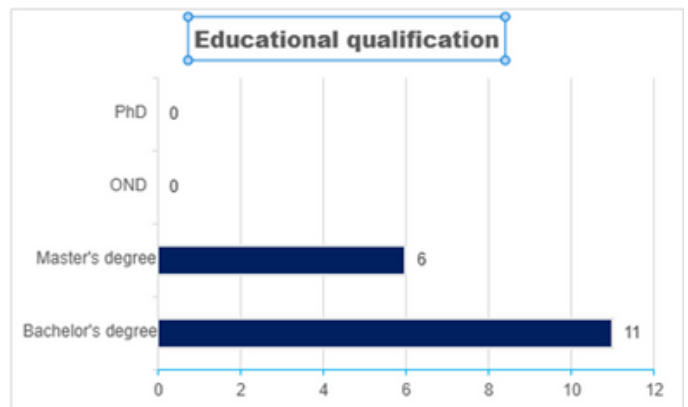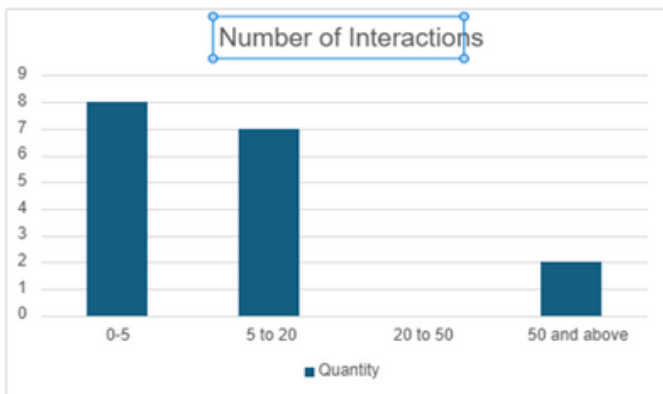
In terms of prior training on neurodiversity, 8 participants indicated that they had received some form of training, while 9 had not.

52%	47%
No	Yes
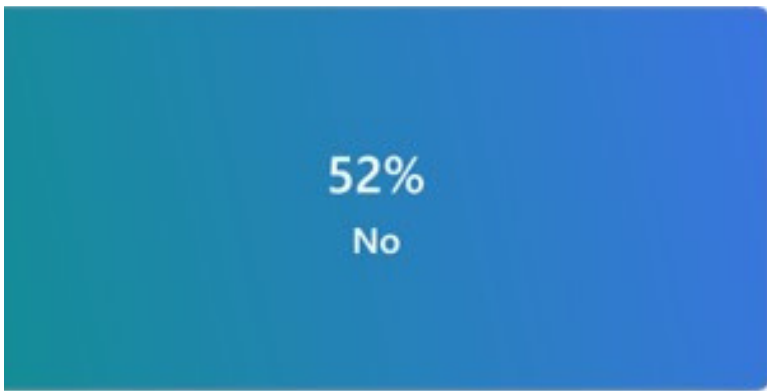
Familiarity with the concept of neurodiversity varied, with 3 participants describing themselves as very familiar, 5 as somewhat familiar, 6 as slightly familiar, and 1 person reported no familiarity at all. However, most participants reported being "familiar" or "very familiar" with the concept of neurodiverse.

35%	35%	23%	5%
Slightly familiar	Somewhat familiar	Very familiar	-

familarity with the concept of neurodiversity

3
10

■ Familiar
■ Very familiar
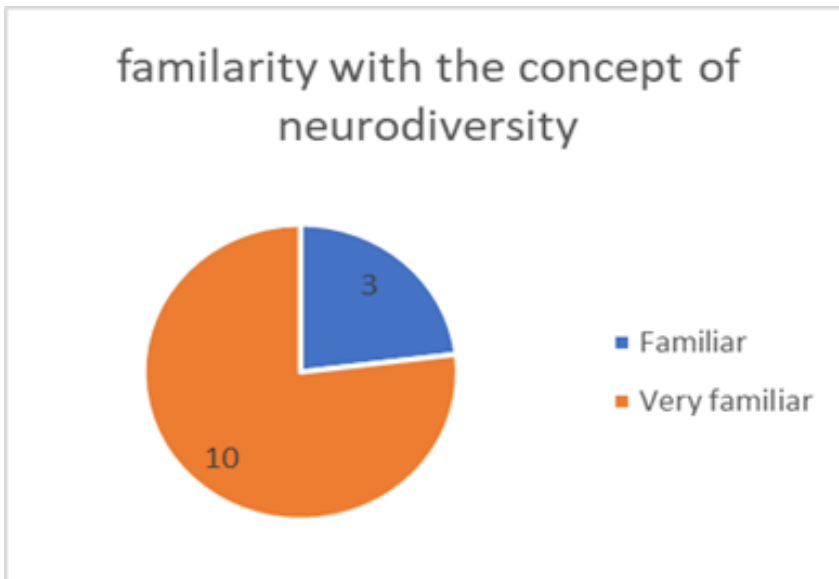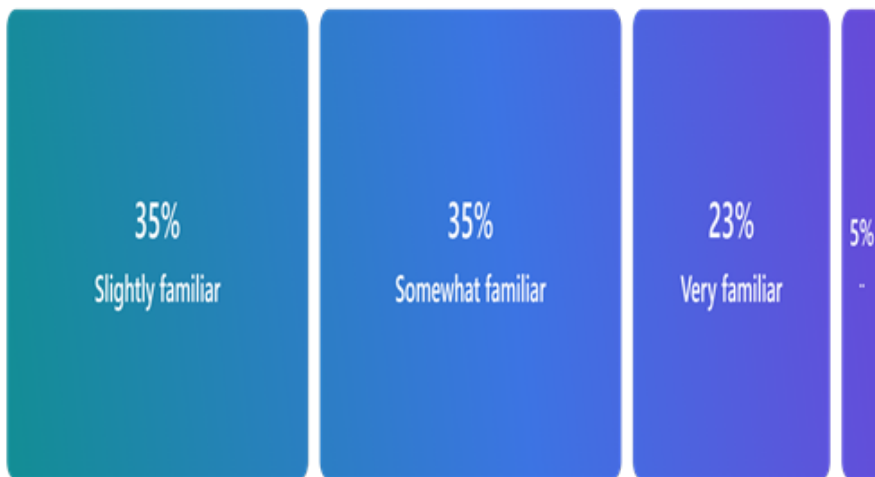
All respondents agreed on the importance of embracing neurodiversity in both educational and social settings, underscoring the value they place on inclusivity.

Confidence levels in identifying neurodiversity traits varied. While 5 participants reported being very confident, 4 were somewhat confident, and 8 were only slightly confident during the baseline but during the endline Participants reported marked improvements in identifying neurodiverse traits: Responses such as "confident" and "very confident" were common.
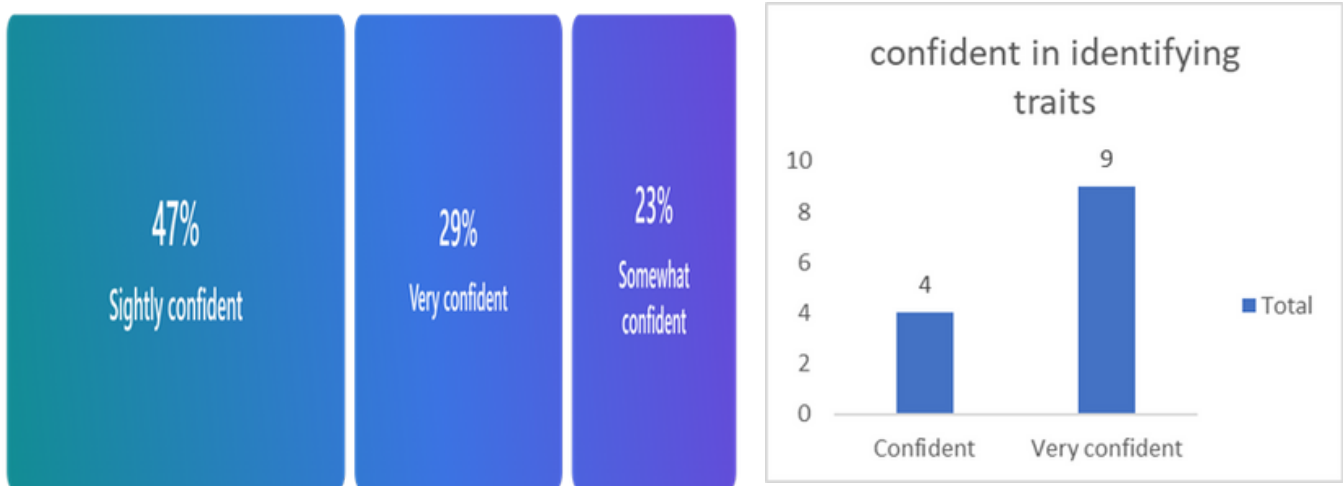
Regarding their preparedness to implement inclusive education for neurodiverse conditions, 3 participants felt they were not equipped at all, 7 felt slightly equipped, and 5 reported being moderately equipped.

Weekly Sessions

Session One

The Neurodiversity Awareness Training on "Introduction to Neurodiversity" shows participants found the content relevant and applicable to their understanding, all participant agreed that the training met its objectives and expectations. While most rated the module quality and facilitator performance as good, there's room for improvement. Key suggestions include resolving technical issues (e.g., presenter's unstable network), providing slides in advance, some participants felt that the two-hour duration of the session was too long, especially without icebreakers, activities, or breakout rooms to keep them engaged. Suggestions were shortening the session or adding interactive elements (e.g., icebreakers), and enabling easier microphone access for better engagement. Addressing these areas will enhance future sessions.

Session Two

The Neurodiversity Awareness Training on "Early Identification and Intervention" indicates high participant satisfaction, with six reporting being satisfied and one very satisfied. All participants found the content clear, relevant, and comprehensive, particularly regarding early identification and therapeutic approaches. when asked about the clarity of the information on identifying neurodiverse traits in early childhood, all participants found it easy to understand. This suggests that the course materials and explanations were well-structured and accessible to everyone, making the concepts clear and straightforward. Resources were considered helpful or very helpful.

Suggestions for improvement include providing more detailed content and expanding the focus to cover neurodiverse traits beyond early childhood. Implementing these changes could further enhance the training's relevance for caregivers and professionals working with neurodiverse individuals across different life stages.

Session Three

The session on "Communication and Social Skills Development" received positive feedback, with five participants rating it excellent and one rating it good. All participants found the content clear and practical, particularly techniques such as using simple language and visual aids. The feedback suggests that some participants may have needed more time to fully absorb the information, indicating a potential need to slow down the pace or allocate additional time to cover the material in more depth. While most participants felt the session pace was appropriate, all participant expressed interest in further training on the topic. Suggestions included offering additional sessions, switching platforms from Teams to Zoom for comfort, and maintaining the strong network connection observed during this session. Implementing these recommendations can enhance future training sessions and better meet participant needs.

Session Four

The session on "Behavioural Management and Emotional Support" received positive feedback, with participants finding the strategies for managing challenging behaviours, such as positive reinforcement and sensory overload management, highly practical and relevant. The content on emotional support and resilience was clear, though one participant suggested providing more detail.

Resources were rated as helpful, and participants appreciated their applicability. A suggestion was made to distinguish strategies for different types of neurodiversity to provide tailored accommodations. Addressing this feedback and offering more detailed content could further enhance future sessions.

Session Five

The session on Educational Strategies focused on supporting neurodiverse learners with strategies like Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), curriculum adaptation, and inclusive classroom practices. Participants responded positively, with most expressing satisfaction and finding the content relevant and applicable.

While the majority rated the IEP guidance as clear, one participant suggested improving clarity. Discussions on inclusive education and advocacy were rated highly helpful, and all participants appreciated the session's practicality. Suggestions included exploring classroom modifications with cost considerations, addressing learners at different developmental stages, and allocating more time for in-depth coverage. These insights will help refine future training sessions for greater impact.

Session Six

The "Building Supportive Communities for Neurodiverse Caregivers" received overwhelmingly positive feedback. Participants highly appreciated the strategies for fostering connections, engaging with local organizations, and accessing resources. Most rated their satisfaction as "Extremely satisfied" or "Very satisfied," and all found the content relevant and clear.

Advocacy discussions were deemed helpful by all participants, and the session provided sufficient detail for building effective local support networks. The strong response highlights the session's practical value in equipping caregivers with actionable guidance for creating supportive communities.

Pre- and Post-Training Confidence

| Metric	Baseline	Endline
Confidence in identidying traits	5 very confident; 8 slightly confident	Significant increase: "confident" responses are common.
Preparedness for inclusive education	3 not equipped; 5 moderately equipped	Most participants reported readiness.
Familiarity with IEPs	Majority lacked experience	Increased use and frequency of IEPs reported.

Implementation of Strategies

Metric	Baseline	Endline
Use of behavioural interventions	Limited Usage	Frequently implemented with positive reinforcement.
Collaboration among stakeholders	Rare collaboration	Increased collaboration between caregivers and educators.

Satisfaction

- Baseline: Participants were eager for knowledge but unsure of practical application.
- Endline: Participants indicated high satisfaction (rated 4–5 out of 5) proving that objectives were largely met.

Conclusion

The Neurodiversity Awareness Training Program has demonstrated substantial success in achieving its objectives of enhancing knowledge, reducing stigma, and equipping participants with practical strategies to support neurodiverse individuals. The baseline findings underscored significant gaps in understanding, widespread stigmatizing attitudes, and a lack of confidence in implementing inclusive practices. These gaps were effectively addressed through targeted training interventions, as evidenced by the improvements observed in the endline survey.
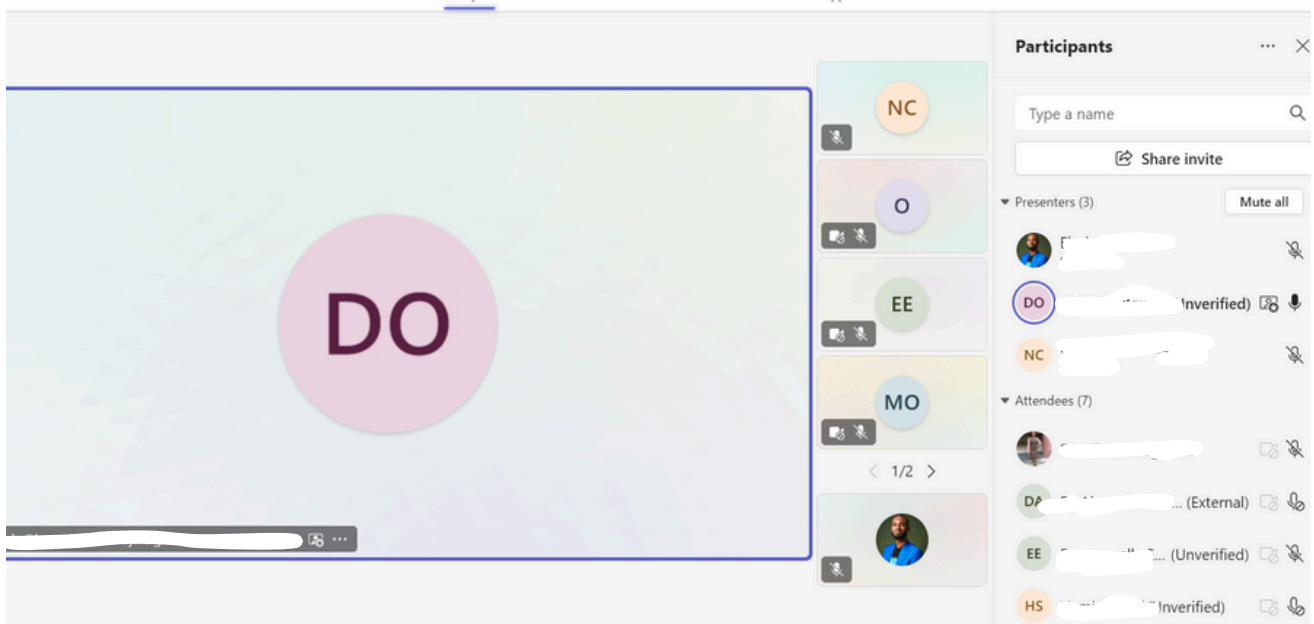
Participants showcased increased confidence in identifying neurodiverse traits, employing behavioural management strategies, and utilizing tools like Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). The shift from limited collaboration to stronger partnerships among educators, caregivers, and therapists signifies progress toward a more inclusive and supportive ecosystem for neurodiverse individuals

The high satisfaction rates and alignment of training outcomes with participants' objectives further validate the program's outcomes.

This program's success highlights the transformative potential of structured awareness training in promoting inclusivity and improving outcomes for neurodiverse individuals. However, the findings also underscore the need for continued efforts, including advanced training modules, enhanced resource availability, and sustained follow-up initiatives to consolidate gains and address emerging challenges. By building on this strong foundation, future iterations can achieve even greater societal impact, fostering environments where neurodiverse individuals can thrive and realize their full potential.

Recommendation

Developing advanced training modules is essential for meeting the diverse needs of participants and ensuring continued progress. Intermediate and advanced sessions can delve into less common neurodiverse conditions and provide in-depth strategies for intervention. Tailoring content to specific groups, such as parents, educators, and therapists, will address their unique challenges and enhance the applicability of the training. By offering specialized modules, the program can cater to participants at different levels of familiarity and need.

Expanding resource availability is another critical recommendation. Partnering with local organizations and government agencies can help provide affordable tools and resources for supporting neurodiverse individuals. A centralized platform can be developed to share evidence-based materials, best practices, and success stories, creating an accessible repository for all stakeholders. This will ensure that participants have the ongoing support needed to implement what they've learned.

To sustain the program's impact, it is vital to enhance follow-up and support mechanisms. Establishing mentorship programs will allow experienced participants to guide newcomers, creating a network of shared expertise and support. Additionally, organizing peer support groups and post-training workshops will reinforce learning and provide a platform for sharing experiences and overcoming challenges.

Long-term impact evaluations are necessary to measure the program's effectiveness over time. Introducing pre- and post-training assessments for future sessions will quantitatively track knowledge retention and behavioural changes. Collecting detailed feedback on the practical applications of training and identifying real-world challenges will provide valuable insights for program improvement.

Strengthening advocacy and awareness campaigns is crucial for fostering societal change. Community-wide initiatives can raise awareness and reduce stigma surrounding neurodiversity. Collaborating with policymakers will help advocate for inclusive educational and workplace practices, ensuring systemic support for neurodiverse individuals.

Integrating technology and innovation into the program will broaden its reach and effectiveness. Digital platforms can facilitate virtual training sessions, making them accessible to participants in remote areas. Mobile applications can offer ongoing support, enabling participants to access personalized strategies and resources conveniently.

Fostering collaboration among stakeholders will create a unified and supportive ecosystem for neurodiverse individuals. Encouraging partnerships between caregivers, educators, healthcare professionals, and community leaders will ensure comprehensive support. Hosting multi-stakeholder forums can facilitate idea exchange, address challenges, and co-develop innovative solutions.

Appendix

BASELINE SURVEY - NEURODIVERSITY AWARENESS TRAINING: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

Dear Participant,

Congratulations once again on being selected for the **Neurodiversity Awareness Training: A Beginner's Guide!** To ensure we understand your current knowledge, skills, and practices before the training begins, we kindly ask you to complete this **Baseline Survey.**

This survey will help us tailor the training to your needs and measure the programme's impact effectively. It should take no more than 10-15 minutes to complete. Your responses are invaluable to us and will remain confidential. Please complete the survey by **Saturday, 5th October.**

Thank you for your time and commitment to making a positive difference in the lives of neurodiverse children. We look forward to learning and growing together in this important journey!

* Required

1. Gender *
   - ○ Male
   - ○ Female

2. Age *
   - ○ Below 18 yrs
   - ○ 18 - 35 yrs
   - ○ 36yrs and above

3. What is your primary role? *
   - ☐ Educator
   - ☐ Caregiver
   - ☐ Therapist
   - ☐ Parent of Neurodiverse Individual
   - ☐ Others

10. How familiar are you with the concept of neurodiversity? *
   - ○ Not familiar at all
   - ○ Slightly familiar
   - ○ Somewhat familiar
   - ○ Very familiar

11. How would you rate your understanding of various neurodiverse conditions (e.g., Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, Dyslexia)? *
   - ○ Excellent
   - ○ Good
   - ○ Fair
   - ○ Poor

12. How important do you think it is to embrace neurodiversity in educational and social settings? *
   - ○ Extremely important
   - ○ Somewhat important
   - ○ Somewhat not important
   - ○ Extremely not important

13. How confident are you in identifying neurodiverse traits in children? *
   - ○ Not confident at all
   - ○ Slightly confident
   - ○ Somewhat confident
   - ○ Very confident

14. How well do you feel equipped to implement inclusive education strategies for neurodiverse children? *
   - ○ Not equipped at all
   - ○ Slightly equipped
   - ○ Moderately equipped
   - ○ Fully equipped

4. Which of the following best describes your settlement? *
   - ○ Urban
   - ○ Rural
   - ○ Suburban

5. Country of Residence *
   E.g.; Liberia
   [   ]

6. What is your highest educational qualification? *
   - ○ OND/HND
   - ○ Bachelor's degree
   - ○ Master's degree
   - ○ PhD

7. How many people with neurodiverse conditions do you estimate you interact with in your daily life? *
   - ○ 0-5 people
   - ○ 5-20 people
   - ○ 20-50 people
   - ○ Above 50 people

8. Have you ever received any formal training on neurodiversity? *
   - ○ Yes
   - ○ No

9. If yes, how many hours of training or education have you received on neurodiversity or related topics in the past year?
   - ○ 0-2 hours
   - ○ 2-5 hours
   - ○ Above 5 hours

15. How confident are you in managing challenging behaviors in neurodiverse children? *
   - ○ Not confident at all
   - ○ Slightly confident
   - ○ Somewhat confident
   - ○ Very confident

16. How confident are you in developing communication strategies tailored to neurodiverse children? *
   - ○ Not confident at all
   - ○ Slightly confident
   - ○ Somewhat confident
   - ○ Very confident

17. How often do you use individualized education plans (IEPs) or similar tools in your current role? *
   - ○ Never
   - ○ Rarely
   - ○ Sometimes
   - ○ Always

18. How often do you use behavioral interventions (e.g., positive reinforcement, managing sensory overload) with neurodiverse children? *
   - ○ Never
   - ○ Rarely
   - ○ Sometimes
   - ○ Often

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19. How often do you collaborate with other caregivers, educators, parents, or therapists to support neurodiverse children? *

○ Never

○ Rarely

○ Sometimes

○ Often

20. How would you rate the availability of resources and support systems for neurodiverse children in your community? *

○ No resources available

○ Limited resources available

○ Adequate resources available

○ Extensive resources available

21. How often do you seek external support (e.g., from organizations, support groups) for assisting neurodiverse children? *

○ Never

○ Rarely

○ Sometimes

○ Often

22. What are your primary reasons for joining this training? *
(Select all that apply)

☐ To improve my knowledge of neurodiversity

☐ To learn new strategies for inclusive education

☐ To enhance communication skills with neurodiverse children

☐ To better manage behavioral challenges

☐ To connect with a community of educators and caregivers

Endline Survey - Neurodiversity Awareness Training: A Beginner's Guide

Thank you for participating in this training. Kindly fill this endline form in order to rate your level of understanding as regards the training.

* Required

1. Gender *

○ Male

○ Female

2. Age *

○ 18-24

○ 25-34

○ 35 and above

3. What is your primary role? *

○ Caregiver

○ Educator

○ Therapist

○ Parent of Neurodiverse Individual

○ Other

4. How familiar are you with the concept of neurodiversity? *

○ Very familiar

○ Familiar

○ Not familiar

Appendix

5. Do you consider yourself to have received a formal training on neurodiversity? *

○ Yes

○ No

6. How would you rate your understanding of various neurodiverse conditions (e.g., Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, Dyslexia)? *

○ Excellent

○ Good

○ Fair

7. How important do you think it is to embrace neurodiversity in educational and social settings? *

○ Extremely important

○ Important

○ Not Important

8. How confident are you in identifying neurodiverse traits in children having taken this course? *

○ Very confident

○ Confident

○ Not confident

9. How well equipped do you feel to implement inclusive education strategies for neurodiverse children having taken this course? *

○ Extremely equipped

○ Equipped

○ Not equipped

10. How confident are you in managing challenging behaviors in neurodiverse children having taken this course? *

○ Extremely confident

○ Confident

○ Not confident

11. How confident are you in developing communication strategies tailored to neurodiverse children having taken this course? *

○ Extremely confident

○ Not confident

○ Confident

12. How often will you now use individualized education plans (IEPs) or similar tools in your current role? *

○ Very often

○ Often

○ Rarely

13. How often will you now use behavioral interventions (e.g., positive reinforcement, managing sensory overload) with neurodiverse children? *

○ Very often

○ Often

○ Rarely

14. How often will you now collaborate with other caregivers, educators, parents, or therapists to support neurodiverse children? *

○ very often

○ often

○ rarely

15. How often will you now seek external support (e.g., from organizations, support groups) for assisting neurodiverse children? *

○ Very often

○ Often

○ Rarely

Appendix

16. What were your primary reasons for joining this training? *
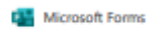(Select all that apply)

- ◯ To improve my knowledge of neurodiversity

- ◯ To learn new strategies for inclusive education

- ◯ To enhance communication skills with neurodiverse children

- ◯ To better manage behavioral challenges

- ◯ To connect with a community of educators and caregivers

- ◯ Other

17. Kindly rate how to what extent these reasons were met? *
Where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆