

Dyslexia and Dyspraxia with Dayna Halliwell

Speaker 1:

Welcome to The Sunflower Conversations, where we explore the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower and its role in supporting people with hidden disabilities.

Chantal Boyle:

Welcome to the Sunflower Conversations with me, Chantal, and today, joining me, is Dayna. Dayna is a digital content creator and actor. Dayna uses her lived experience of dyslexia and dyspraxia on her platforms to raise awareness of her learning difficulties. Dayna is also a Sunflower friend. Hello, Dayna. Welcome to The Sunflower Podcast. How are you?

Dayna Halliwell:

Hey. I'm really good. I'm excited to chat all things learning difficulties in disabilities.

Chantal Boyle:

Okay. Well, let's start off. Can you please tell me about your dyslexia and dyspraxia?

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah, so I'm probably best off splitting them up, because obviously they're quite different. I'll start with dyspraxia, because that's the one that's come to the forefront of my mind the quickest. For me, dyspraxia is feeling like I'm in a perpetual state of inelegance, and having to navigate the world an extra 50% than everybody else. It means that tasks that are probably more automatic for other people are more strenuous for me. I have to really think about them, moving up steps, getting off trains, to make sure I keep myself and others safe. So that's kind of how I experience dyspraxia.

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty, and it is best thought of as a continuum, so it's best thought of as being very individual. For me, I really struggle with memory and remembering information, the classics, spelling, having great ideas in my head, but just really struggling to write them down without assistance or help. But I do think dyslexia affects many areas of my life, that I'm maybe perhaps been unaware of, whether it's taking down WiFi passwords, or finding the train times. There's lots of different ways, socially and academically, that it impacts that experience.

Chantal Boyle:

Thank you. Are they comorbidities, do you-

Dayna Halliwell:

What do you mean by comorbidity? You mean is they co-occurring?

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah, so if somebody is dyslexic, would it be general that there might be a comorbidity dyspraxia, or dyscalculia, or something else, ADHD?

Dayna Halliwell:

Yes. Yes, they are co-occurring, but they can be individual as well. It is likely somebody that has one neurodivergence probably has another. There's a lot of crossover. So yes, like me, dyslexia and dyspraxia, but for some people, they'll just experience dyslexia, dyspraxia. Some people might be dyslexic and autistic. It's quite assimilated, but yeah, there is kind of like a pool.

Chantal Boyle:

Okay.

Dayna Halliwell:

Like a swimming pool.

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah. And when did you notice that your processing was different from your peers?

Dayna Halliwell:

I think that's quite an interesting question, because I was only officially diagnosed at 18. But, from around year three, teachers were having discussions with my parents about my progress, both in sports and in learning. And I would say that I have really, really significant early memories of being in year three, and yeah everybody else was doing a geography day, and I was on the pink table, which was obviously the neurodivergent table. And we would be taken out of lesson and be doing activities that were significantly different to our peers, things like being asked to do colouring in as opposed to answer questions. So I think from a young age, I kind of got a complex about intelligence and processing, to be honest. I felt very under par to everybody else, but nobody would actually have a discussion with me, to tell me what was actually going on, or how I could navigate the world.

Chantal Boyle:

Do you think at that point, your teachers were thinking, "Oh, dyslexia"? Do you think they were thinking that at that point, or that they just noticed that there was a learning difference, and they just thought that was the best route to do, put you on a separate table, pink?

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah. So basically, those conversations from primary school, and the word dyslexia was brought up constantly, but we couldn't afford the assessment, and the school weren't willing to refer me for the assessment. So I was kind of left in this limbo place, where teachers knew that perhaps I had a learning difficulty, and they could identify it as being dyslexia, so I kind of got half support. Not legal support, but kind of like "You're on the pink table. You'll do the colouring pages with the people that are diagnosed." Well, they obviously had an inclination, but there was barriers in place that affected me getting assessed.

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah. So what do you think are the biggest myths that you encounter regarding dyslexia and dyspraxia?

Dayna Halliwell:

Dyslexia, I will probably say, like in a really bold statement, not being able to read. You know, I can read. I enjoy reading. It just might take me a little bit longer. I've had a lot of people say to me like, "Oh, you're reading a book? You did a master's degree? How?" And it's like, "I can read. I just take longer, and might need assistance," you know, whether it's assistive technology, whether it's an audiobook, whilst I'm reading. I can read, so that's probably one of the main misconceptions, I'd say.

And also, for dyslexia, that always words move on the page for someone who's dyslexic, which is not accurate. For some people, yes, that's the case, especially if it's co-occurring with visual distress, which I do have, but for some people, they don't experience any kind of visual dyslexia on the page, because dyslexia's primarily a processing difficulty. So it's all like yeah.

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah.

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah, and dyspraxia, it's difficult, because I think the misconception is that it just affects clumsiness, and your ability to like catch a ball. Or like, if you're not engaging in sports, or you don't have a career in sports, then there's no possible way that dyspraxia is affecting you, which is totally inaccurate. Like, dyspraxia affects so many different things, whether it's how you navigate a conversation in social groups, getting dressed every day, doing buttons. It's not just about being able to catch a ball, or being good at sports. Yes, that might be a factor for some people, but for a lot of us, we have a lot of daily struggles that are more significant than being able to catch a ball.

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah. That's interesting. You said that this dyspraxia can disrupt your social interaction with people. Are you able to explain a bit more about that?

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah. When it's one-on-one, I find one-on-one a lot easier to navigate, because I can feel the tempo of the conversation. When it's in a group situation, I feel like sometimes my brain is working perhaps a little step behind everybody else. So often, the conversation has moved on by the time I'm willing to put my input in. And then it kind of all ends up really jumbled, and also just feeling really overwhelmed by the level of noise, and the different conversations that are happening. It's hard to know like where the right place is to jump in, and I feel like that's something that people don't necessarily know about dyspraxia. They probably center it more around autism, but dyspraxia can affect how you interact in social situations, particularly groups. Being able to navigate group conversations is really difficult for a lot of us.

Chantal Boyle:

And does dyslexia have any impact on social situations?

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah. Dyslexia, there's not a lot of research around dyslexia in social situations, but of course it affects you outside the classroom and education. Like, everything, everything in the world we have made up is kind of built against us in a lot of ways, whether it's WiFi passwords, train timetables, misunderstanding a word or pronouncing a word wrong, and then being laughed at, and then your self-esteem being really affected. So socially, I think that the biggest thing for me was self-esteem for a really long time. You know, having a negative self-concept in a classroom just meant that I was taking that negative self-concept in every situation in my life, feeling that I was under power everywhere I went. And there's been so much research about the link between mental health, self-esteem, and dyslexia. Like, it's absolute. Like, the kind of experience, the dyslexic experience, perpetuates self-esteem, like self-esteem issues. So it kind of trickles out into other areas.

And I think it's also very specific to whatever field you're in. For me, I'm an actor, so obviously, I have to learn lines. I have to learn scripts. And then when I get into a rehearsal room, I'm asked to move while speaking, which is then another difficulty, because I've got dyspraxia as well, so I'm having to move my mouth and my body. So I think it's very individual, and I would say my advice is if you have anyone in your life that is dyslexia or dyspraxic, is to ask them how it affects them, because they will have the best understanding of it.

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah. No two people are going to have the exact same experience, are they?

Dayna Halliwell:

No, exactly.

Chantal Boyle:

What do you think, with the education system at the moment, or your experience? Because for me personally, going to university would have been a no-no, because just the thought of having to deal with all this reading, and how long it would take me, was really overwhelming, so I didn't even consider going. What's your thoughts about that?

Dayna Halliwell:

Well, that's why I think it's important to have these conversations beyond dyslexia, or any particular difficulty. Obviously, we do need to have those conversations as well, but making academia and higher education, and lower education more accessible benefits everybody, because you've got a lot to give. I think you'd have to find it, but quite a high proportion of NASA employees are dyslexic, which is a great example of how we have a lot to give. But if we're not given the tools to be able to express it, then it's not going to come across. And, there are many other ways of showing learning beyond writing. We all know that, with how we engage in everything, with all the multimedia we use. It is applicable if we start applying it.

Chantal Boyle:

That's great. It's interesting to know that a lot of the employees at NASA are dyslexic.

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah. It does show quite a bit that obviously, that 3D awareness, or the bigger picture, which we often focus on when we're dyslexic, is [inaudible 00:10:48] beneficial in a lot of settings.

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah. And it's just great to know, isn't it? That nothing should be ruled out.

Dayna Halliwell:

No.

Chantal Boyle:

Things are achievable. It's just finding a different path to get there.

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah, and the space you're in should be able to change and move with you. I think that's what we're striving for, isn't it? We're striving for moldability within society. For all disabilities. Kind of like it's not one shoe fits all. It never will be, you know? [inaudible 00:11:20]

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah, and it never should have been.

Dayna Halliwell:

No, it never should have been. I don't know how we got here, to be honest.

Chantal Boyle:

And you have completed a master's degree, so you got off of the pink table.

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah.

Chantal Boyle:

Was the degree in dyslexia and dyspraxia?

Dayna Halliwell:

The degree was in specific learning difficulties in the arts, and I focused on dyslexia, but did a lot of work on dyspraxia as well.

Chantal Boyle:

So in the arts, so you mean from sort of like a creative performing perspective.

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah. It was kind of focused about higher arts education, because a lot of neurodivergent people are attracted to the arts, because it's a place where we're able to find expression and commonality. There's a lot of... The neurodivergent community makes up a high proportion of the arts sector. So it's kind of about how navigating that, and particularly when arts meets academic, and how you have to navigate those spaces. You know, having to write an essay, or I don't know, having to travel in every day when you're dyspraxic, on a bus. It was about those lived-in experiences, and my master's focused on kind of autobiographical mixed with action reset.

Chantal Boyle:

And did you receive support at university?

Dayna Halliwell:

At undergraduate, I did, but at master's level, I didn't. And that basically comes down to the system of DSA. Basically, being dyslexia and dyspraxic, I misplaced my EP reports, which is quite common.

Chantal Boyle:

Your EP report is what?

Dayna Halliwell:

An educational psychologist report, so like the assessment of my dyslexia and my dyspraxia, in full. I'd misplaced it, so I contacted my university who had done the assessment, the up-to-date assessment, and asked them if they could send me a copy. It took them a couple of months to get it back to me. I was already in the first term of my master's by that point. I got that back, and when I [inaudible 00:13:14] the essay, which is Disabled Students Allowance, which is a pot of money set up by the government to support disabled students, and by disability, it's anything that falls under the Equalities Act, so dyslexia and dyspraxia is a part of that. By the time I would have finished that process, I would have finished my master's. So I didn't have any support at master's level, and apparently the fact that I was dyslexia in my undergraduate didn't matter that much, because they still needed to see my EP report, even though it's not going anywhere.

Chantal Boyle:

Oh, so they're not... That's something that needs to be changed?

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah. I mean, honestly, I kind of feel like if you have an EP report, it should be on your NHS file.

Chantal Boyle:

Well, of course. Yeah.

Dayna Halliwell:

But honestly.

Chantal Boyle:

I mean, you go... There's an NHS app, isn't there? You can't even book an appointment at the doctor's now without going through an app. Like, everything is on there.

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah, exactly.

Chantal Boyle:

So yeah, there's definitely a disconnect, isn't there?

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah, and I think as well, that brings us to quite an interesting conversation about how particularly dyslexia and dyspraxia is often left out of a lot of disabled conversations, because we kind of often feel like you're half in, half out. You'll go to, and you'll see a form, and it'll be like, "Do you have a disability?" And then your whole life, you've been told it's a learning difficulty, so you're like, "Well, no, I don't." And then they're like, "Well, actually, it falls into the Equalities Act, so you do, kind of." So it's really quite complex for a lot of individuals with it, to be able to navigate what terminology to identify with. That's why I personally now identify with the word disabled, because it just allows me to take up space. It allows me to be like, "I'm entitled to this, this, and this," and that's it, you know? But it took me a long time to get to that.

Chantal Boyle:

Can you expand on that phrase, "take up space"?

Dayna Halliwell:

Mm-hmm. It's kind of a phrase that I've developed in my own life. For a really long time, I felt like I was having a lot of accessible conversations in my head, about how I navigate the world, and it got to a point, particularly in my master's, where I was like, actually, the onus... What's that word?

Chantal Boyle:

Onus.

Dayna Halliwell:

The onus, that's it, is on society, particularly in the social model of disability, which I know has its flaws, but I do like that model of disability for that reason, that you put the responsibility on society to make it inclusive for everybody. So by taking up space, going into a room and being like, "I'm dyspraxic. I need to use the elevator today, because I'm really tired, and I feel like my dyspraxia's going to affect me a bit more today." That's taking up space. Going in there, statements of power, saying what we need, not being apologetic. You know, "Actually, sorry, sir. I know you don't know me. However, I am dyslexic, and as you'll find in my EP report, I require yellow paper, so could you have this for next time?" You know, trying to hit the ground running with new people. Every time I meet someone new, I immediately tell them that I'm dyslexic and dyspraxic. And particularly if it's in a situation that's going to really bring it out, then I will say, and I will let you know as we go on, what's happening.

Example, like I'm on tour at the moment. I'm acting. Every space we do is different. Every theater space we go to is different, and so often, there's quite a few physical theatre bits, whether it's like a slap, or it's like a jump on someone's back, and for someone who's not dyspraxic, they won't even really think about having to mark something like that. But for me and the distance in the room, I always put my hand up if I'm not feeling comfortable, and say, "Yeah, that's not going to work for me." There was like a tripod the other day, covering the entrance to the stage, and I just said to the floor captain like, "That leg there, I will fall. It's likely I will fall, and I will really struggle to actually stop myself, so we need to move that." So that's taking up space in whatever environment you're in, feeling powerful in your disabilities and your difficulties, and knowing that you've got a legal right. That's what I always come back to.

Chantal Boyle:

But I think that's really important. It's owning it, owning yourself, isn't it? And not being apologetic for the way we are as individuals. Also, it helps the people that you're interacting with, because how can they second guess, "Why is this person reacting in this way, or tripping over that, or... Why are you acting like that," you know? But if you just put it out there, everybody knows. Just makes it so much easier for everybody.

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah, it nips it in the bud. It also invites conversation. So by saying like, "I'm dyspraxic and dyslexia, so when I come up to you and I go, "That's not going to work for me," "Okay, yeah, that makes total sense. Like, I don't know much about this disability, but you've told me about it, how it affects you, so sure." It's about engaging in those normal... Because without it, this is where I think we probably face a lot of negative comments, like, "Oh, she's so clumsy. Oh, she's a diva," you know? Like, and it's like, I'm not a diva. I require access, and if that's what that is, then yeah, I suppose I'm a diva, but I'm not.

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah, no, it's great. Your attitude is perfect. It's positive. And like you said, it gives you a sense of power as well, taking the power back. Yeah, no, it's fantastic.

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So, what do you use your social media for? You're a content creator. You've got a very big reach. You're on TikTok and Instagram.

Dayna Halliwell:

Mm-hmm.

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah, can you tell me about that?

Dayna Halliwell:

Of course. I just began documenting my lived-in experience, and making it into theatrical content. Quite often, day-to-day, I will experience something, whether it's ableism, or an inaccessible space, and I'll write it down in my notes and go... Or I'll learn something new about my disability that day and be like, "Huh, that affects that." Like the other day, I was in a restaurant, and someone said to me, "Oh, you always order the same thing. Like, you always order pizza and burgers." I was like, "Oh, because I don't have to use cutlery." And then I was like, "Oh. Like, that is a decision directly made by my dyspraxia, that I was so unaware of." You know, so I wrote that down and made a TikTok on it. So I kind of use it as a documentation space, like a diary, and it seems to resonate with a lot of people. You know, you often end up with these really interesting conversations in the comments, where it's like a safe space to start talking about disability. Even if you have negative connotations about it, to bring it to the forefront, and then somebody in that community will respond and be like, "Actually, you're a bit misunderstood here. Like, here's a link [inaudible 00:20:00] to a resource." That's my favorite thing about the community. They're always willing to be like, "You're wrong. Here's a link."

Chantal Boyle:

We as individuals never stop learning, and things change. Language changes, so it's really important to be open and receptive to the conversation, isn't it? And obviously, you're doing a great job of stimulating that conversation. And also, I think it can be difficult for somebody who is neurodivergent, who is experiencing differences to maybe their peers, to talk about it sometimes, maybe with their nearest and dearest, because that sometimes it can be like, "No, you're fine."

Dayna Halliwell:

"You're fine," yeah.

Chantal Boyle:

"You've always been like this. It's fine. No, don't be so hard on yourself." Well, actually, there's a difference, and I'd just like to talk about it. I'm not upset about it, but I just want to talk about it, and see what kind of strategies other people use to navigate some of the issues or differences that I might experience. So it's really great to have that open platform.

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah, I think people as well just need to realize that a disabled person or a neurodivergent person is not trying to attack you when they try to educate you. It's not an attack. It's a, "I really want you to understand me, because that's really important to me, because I've spent my whole life being the only person that kind of understands my needs and not really knowing why." And it's really interesting you touched on that comment, because I actually find the most ableism I received is from people who professed to love me. And it's not intentional. It's not like it's coming from a horrible place. They just want me to be fine. They don't want me to be in a marginalized group. They don't want me to identify with that marginalized group, you know? They want me to be, "I'm fine. I'm Dayna." Like, they've known me my whole life. "Yeah, she's a bit clumsy," and I think that's a really interesting thing.

And even within friendships, that's why coming back to the lanyard, I've said it before in Sunflower friends, that I find the lanyard acts as a reminder to people that are really close to me as well. It reminds them that yes, I am your Dayna, in your life, but I do also have a disability, and you need to account for that constantly. And just because you're fed up with my disability doesn't make it go away. So if you're exasperated by me being a bit slow, I can't change that. So sometimes in those moments of frustration, it allows the people around me to look at me and go, "Oh, the lanyard. Okay. If we miss that train, it's fine." You know?

Chantal Boyle:

It's that nonverbal communication, isn't it? It saves the chat.

Dayna Halliwell:

It's so vital, yeah. It's so, so important.

Chantal Boyle:

Do you find that many people recognize it? I mean, you're obviously wearing it within your social circle and within your family, so they must all know what it means.

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah. My social circle and family absolutely know what it is now. You know, I've even had some close family members also have approached me about, "Well, does this fall under the Equalities Act? Should I get a lanyard?" And I'm like, "Yeah, absolutely."

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah.

Dayna Halliwell:

You know, whether it's... What's the diabetes, or autism. I'm like, "Absolutely." Take up space. It's there to help you in situations where people might presume you're being difficult, and you're not. You're actually just wanting to take up space and access that world. So yeah, it does. I mean, in terms of the general population, I feel like there's still a little bit of work that needs to be done there, but we'll get there. You know, I find that I've noticed quite a significant change on trains. For quite a while, I had one ticket guy come up to me and say, "Oh, do you like butter?" And he pointed at the lanyard, and I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Oh, like flora. Do you work for flora?" Yeah, and I was like, "No, this is a hidden disability lanyard." And he was like, "Oh. [inaudible 00:23:56]"

Chantal Boyle:

"Oh, what's that?"

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah, yeah. And then you know, six months moving on from that, at Reading Station, which is a great, accessible representation of an accessible station, they're very aware what it is. They see my lanyard, and they're like, "Do you need any help? What platform are you looking for? Do you want me to carry your suitcase?" They really are fantastic. So, seeing that transformation is really like it makes you feel like you're being seen, basically, for the first time.

Chantal Boyle:

And that's the whole point of it, isn't it? Like, you put it on when you feel like you need to be seen.

Dayna Halliwell:

Yes, exactly. And for me, that's always in like train stations, really busy public spaces, really hectic spaces. So yeah, no, I find it's a great tool, and also kind of, I often find that if I've been asked for something and I'm feeling a bit shaky, I'll hold the lanyard, and I'll shove it in their face, and be like, "Can I use the elevator?"

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah.

Dayna Halliwell:

You know? And then they kind of clock it, and they're like, "Yeah, sure." So it stops this kind of like, "Have you got your assessment with you right now?"

Chantal Boyle:

But also, there's a perception that if you're young, you know? Then you're not disabled. You don't have any health conditions if you're young. Doesn't happen to young people.

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah. Like-

Chantal Boyle:

And Dayna, I should say, is a young woman. It's not visible, and that's the whole point, isn't it?

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah. I often find the conversation surrounding buses really interesting, because like I use public transport a lot. Because of my dyspraxia, I struggle learn to drive. It's quite inaccessible for me to do. I've had over like 100 hours, and I don't think it's going to happen. It could happen, but I don't know. So I use a lot of public transport, buses in particular, and quite often, if the train is full, that is the only time I will ask to sit in the disabled seat. If somebody is in the seats, and I will say, "Excuse me. Do you have a hidden disability or are you disabled?" And they say, "No." I say, "Okay," and I get my lanyard, and I say, "I'm really sorry, but I'm dyspraxic, and I can't stand up on this bus." But I find it a really interesting... Because that's when I've had my most traumatic disabled experiences, you know? Someone immediately getting very like I'm taking something from them that I don't deserve. It's like, "Well, you look fine." And it's like, "Okay. What do you think a hidden disability is? What do you want disability to look like? Tell me what you want it to look like." Like, and I always think it's really interesting conversation, because obviously, so many disabilities are non-visible. Like, the predominant disabled people, it's non-visible. So I don't quite-

Chantal Boyle:

I think it's like 80%, isn't it?

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah, so I don't actually quite know what they're looking for. They're looking for the one perception that they've ingested from popular culture media, you know? They're looking for Sheldon from Big Bang, or they're looking for a wheelchair user, you know? And actually, it's a whole plethora of different disabilities that affect you in different ways. So it's always an interesting conversation, and I think that's one thing that definitely needs looking at, is that young people can be disabled, and we make up quite a proportion of the disabled community, actually. Like, we are here. We exist, and we deserve access. But buses are always interesting, because obviously, elderly people get on, and quite often, I've had people look at me and be like... And I'll be like, "Okay, I can move, but I need..." And then some people will be like, "You should really move. You should respect your elders." And I'm like, "Oh, well actually, I'm disabled, and there's no other seats on this bus. So actually maybe [inaudible 00:27:32]"

Chantal Boyle:

"You can move."

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah, like [inaudible 00:27:34]

Chantal Boyle:

"You give me your seat, and she can have my seat."

Dayna Halliwell:

[inaudible 00:27:37] Yeah, exactly, right? So it's... And they're the conversations that I find... They're almost like nonverbal conversations. The looks that I get, that I find difficult. And it's the same when I use the disabled toilet as well. Like, I've only recently started doing that, because for ages, I felt like I wasn't entitled to it. But in train stations and stuff, when I've got my bag, like those cubicles, honestly with my dyspraxia, I struggle so much, like not hurting myself getting my bag in there, and like... I find it such an overwhelming space. And yet when I tell people that I use that toilet on TikTok or whatever, I'll get a lot of like, "You don't need to use that. You're not in a wheelchair. You don't need to use that." And it's like, "Well, actually, my spatial awareness is affected, so I do have a right to that space."

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah.

Dayna Halliwell:

[inaudible 00:28:23] That was a ramble, but it works.

Chantal Boyle:

Well, I mean, I've spoken to somebody else who can't face those conversations, and so doesn't get on a bus because of that exact same reasons that you've just been explaining, the looks, the judgment, and this particular individual has cystic fibrosis, and that's very hidden, and standing up on a bus when all the flare-up levels are going all over the place, it's just not possible. But she's found herself sitting on the floor whilst somebody who doesn't have any disabilities is casting judgment on her because she sat in a disabled, or a seat, a priority seat, and the idea of The Sunflower is supposed to get that nonverbal communication. You shouldn't have to explain yourself to anyone. [inaudible 00:29:23]

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah, shouldn't have to whip out your report, yeah.

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah. But you know, hopefully, we will-

Dayna Halliwell:

We're working.

Chantal Boyle:

At some point, we're working towards it, and everybody will be like the staff at Reading Train Station.

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah, shout-out to them, because they're brilliant, honestly.

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah, shout-out, Reading Train Station.

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah. I always... I literally navigate my... If I can, I'll always put via Reading. That's how important it is. I will literally go three hours out of my way to go to an accessible station.

Chantal Boyle:

So, you act, but you also write. What's the process like? And I'm thinking about your dyslexia here. What's the process like for you? What strategies have you developed?

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah, so in terms of writing, I write a lot of blog posts and kind of academic-based reports, and well, firstly, I would say that dyslexia and dyspraxia, and disability in general, is an intense interest for me, so it's always interesting. And I think that's actually a strategy, writing about something that you're passionate about. It really helps, especially if it's something you identify with. In terms of like practical support, there are a couple of bits of software that I swear by, that are free, so Natural Reader online, which is like a free software that just reads out text, and it's a great resource. You can use it without kind of signing up. Just, you can import documents, and you can pick the accent as well, so it kind of... If it's American, or British, or whatever.

So I use that, and I also create a lot of mood boards, which sounds quite arty, doesn't it? But I do, particularly if it's... Yeah, so I will... The way I approach essays, for example, is I will attach a theme to a color, and then will create a mood board surrounding that color. Then off that, then will spiral into my different points. So the images might not necessarily be related, but for example, say if my introduction is... The introduction's a great one, actually. The introduction, you say a brief line about what this is going to say, and then you kind of do a mini-bio of each section. So I split it up into the different colors, and I look at that mood board and sum up that mood board visually. And then that always kind of helps me to correlate the themes.

Chantal Boyle:

Right.

Dayna Halliwell:

It also means when I've got like a massive document, if each section is a different color, I'm able to scroll and be like, "Oh, I'm looking for the purple section. There it is." Like, it helps me move faster. But honestly, the biggest accessible taking up space that I do for myself is giving myself time. Even if others don't want to give me that time, I will demand that time, you know? If someone wants a report tomorrow, I'm like, "That's not going to happen. I need a week." So I would say time and free software online, and then also, I am receiving access to work, which wasn't a great experience. That's a different conversation. Which you know, has helped a little bit, and [inaudible 00:32:25]

Chantal Boyle:

What is access to work?

Dayna Halliwell:

Access to work is quite similar to DSA. It's like a funding pot available to disabled employees, to access their workspace or access work. I'm self-employed, so many people don't actually know that you are eligible for access to work as somebody who's self-employed, but you absolutely are. And you know, it's a very similar process to DSA. You do an online form. You get a call back months later. You then have an assessment, and then you're given assistive technology basically. That seems to be the bandaid response for everything. It's like assistive tech, which has its place, but I was... For example, I was basically told in my assessment that, "Your dyspraxia and OCD, like we actually can't really help you with that, because that's a lifelong condition, but dyslexia we can help you with."

Chantal Boyle:

Right.

Dayna Halliwell:

And I was like, "Okay, but is it not also?" But it was very odd, and it was like-

Chantal Boyle:

That they've got like a one size fits all approach to-

Dayna Halliwell:

[inaudible 00:33:27] Yeah, that's exactly what it is. And then they just started reeling off software that I know quite intensely because of my master's degree, that I know doesn't work for me. So then I think I irritated them, because I was like, "Actually, no, I don't want that," and then they ended up offering me like three grand worth of assistive technology that I actually didn't want, and I said... And then at the end, they were like, "So what is it that you want?" And I said, "I want a subscription to Grammarly that will cost you 50 pounds a year, and I want a screen extender, because I struggle to transmit information." "Oh, well you can't prove that that will help with your dyslexia or dyspraxia."

Chantal Boyle:

Oh my gosh.

Dayna Halliwell:

Okay, so you're telling me that my lived-in experience is not appropriate in this situation. They've got one document that basically says like, "Oh, you're dyslexic? You must need a spelling software, and we will tell you which software you're going to use."

Chantal Boyle:

Oh, dear.

Dayna Halliwell:

So it's not great.

Chantal Boyle:

So they are a barrier.

Dayna Halliwell:

They are a barrier, yeah. I mean, the whole process was fairly traumatic, to be honest. You have to go through a whole interview process about how dyslexia and dyspraxia has affected you, and then at the end, I feel like they just give you the same things they probably give everybody. They weren't actually listening to me. They made me go through that entire kind of dialogue about my disabilities, and then at the end of it, it was just like, "Okay, yeah, so do you want Dragon?" Which is a speaking software that is very common in the dyslexic community, which if they knew about dyspraxia, would know I struggle to formulate sentences, so I would struggle to do that. That software wouldn't work for me. But they were not interested in dyspraxia or OCD. They were only interested in dyslexia, because it's something they knew how to deal with, and they felt comfortable dealing with, and-

Chantal Boyle:

I've heard of Grammarly. A few people have mentioned that as a good support.

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah. I do really... During my master's, I found it very beneficial, because it also has a... It's very user-friendly, right? A lot of these softwares they were offering me also has all these things that Grammarly can do, but it's not as user-friendly. And for me personally, I find Grammarly very easy to navigate. [inaudible 00:35:19]

Chantal Boyle:

Well, that's the whole key, isn't it? It's supposed to sort of level up and bring... make those things achievable, and not more draining on your energy.

Dayna Halliwell:

[inaudible 00:35:31]

Chantal Boyle:

So how does it work? Do you just say a sentence, and then it types it out, or how does it work?

Dayna Halliwell:

No. Grammarly is like I will have already written a certain paragraph, and then I'll import it into the software, and basically, it will run like a check. So it'll do spelling, grammar, and then if you've got the premium version, which most dyslexics like I do, it will suggest rephrasing sentences. Quite often, I've got a sentence back to front, and it will pick up on that. Or like, a great example is I often say things like, "Me and Jasmine went to the park." It would say like, "Jasmine and I went to the park." It would rephrase it, to be more academically appropriate, which is a feature that I particularly love. I'm not sponsored by Grammarly by the way. I just really like Grammarly.

Chantal Boyle:

No, it's not the first time... Well, a couple of people have spoken about it and said, "Oh, it's a really great tool," and I just was interested to know how it actually works.

Dayna Halliwell:

Yeah, it's got lots of different... It's also got a reference checker on it as well, so it really helps with referencing. I mean, it is still at a cost. This is the thing. Like, the disabled experience is never free, is it?

Chantal Boyle:

No.

Dayna Halliwell:

That's why I applied to access to work, to be like, "I need a bit of help covering this," and it was completely disregarded. So it's something that I, as an identifying disabled person, now have to fork out. So it's just another thing to add next to all the mistake train tickets that I've bought, that I can't get a refund on.

Chantal Boyle:

Do you have any advice for anyone who's listening, who thinks that they might have dyslexia, if we just focus on dyslexia first? Do you have any advice, any words of wisdom that you could impart?

Dayna Halliwell:

Do you mean if they think they've got it, or if [inaudible 00:37:14]

Chantal Boyle:

If they think that they may have it.

Dayna Halliwell:

If you're in the workplace or in an educational setting, maybe approach your employer or your student services, to get an assessment. Because honestly, labels exist for a reason. They carry a weight of preexisting knowledge and research, and it's how we're able to identify ourselves. So I find the easiest way I've been able to heal is to find my home in terminology. You know, getting a formal diagnosis, which is a privilege, but if you can and if you're able to access, it's definitely something that you should look into.

On the other hand, if you are like me and don't have access to that for a really long time, because of other barriers in society, try and take up space where you can. Try and communicate to the people around you that you're struggling with certain areas. You know, even if you're not dyslexic, we should all be able to voice our needs, you know? You should be able to be like, "You know, I'm really struggling with this," and it should be met with love and understanding and support. So where you can, try and take up support.

And, if you're really struggling to have conversations, either look into getting a Sunflower lanyard, or you could just show them my TikToks. I've got a few TikToks that's like, "You're struggling with this conversation? I'll have it for you." I have a few videos like that, where you can literally just show the person, and it will express that for you. So you know, finding creatives that you identify with, sharing that kind of multimedia approach within your sphere, to try and help them understand you better. That would be my advice.

Chantal Boyle:

And what is your... How can people find you on social media?

Dayna Halliwell:

On TikTok and Instagram, it's DyslexicDayna. I know. I don't know why dyslexia's spelled so difficultly, but yeah, it's DyslexicDayna on TikTok and Instagram.

Chantal Boyle:

That's great, and we'll include the links to it in the show notes. And then, is your advice for somebody who thinks they may have dyspraxia, is it the same, or is it different?

Dayna Halliwell:

It's a little bit different, so dyspraxia's an interesting conversation, because the term dyspraxia is actually an umbrella term. And what I mean by that is dyspraxia is a way of explaining a cluster of symptoms, and it can be... Someone that's had a stroke, for example, could be exhibiting dyspraxic-like symptoms, post-stroke, but in recovery. The dyspraxia that mine is is because I was a premature baby, and also had meningitis, so I had a brain injury afterwards. The first protocol for that would be going to see your GP, actually, and seeing if you can get a referral. And my strongest advice for interacting with GPs and surgeries is to be firm. We do have a right to be referred for assessment, and they probably don't know intensely about dyspraxia, so I don't think they have a right to tell you whether you have it or not. So push for that diagnosis, or push for the referral.

Chantal Boyle:

That's brilliant. That's really useful, and take up space.

Dayna Halliwell:

Take up space, definitely. Take up space. And, oh, in the meantime, if you haven't got diagnosis yet, but you know, we know our lived-in experience, we know if we're... To be honest, I think I saw this great statistic that was like... I think 95% of people that self-diagnose off social media are accurate.

Chantal Boyle:

Oh, really?

Dayna Halliwell:

[inaudible 00:40:34]

Chantal Boyle:

That's interesting. 95?

Dayna Halliwell:

I'll find it and I'll send it to you, but I saw this, particularly with autism, you know? Because people are always like, "Oh, there's all this self-diagnosis these days," and then this woman actually did a study on it, and was like, "Guys, this is human to human, going I do that. Yeah. Like, yeah." And it's actually quite a high statistic about people, that it turns out to be very accurate. And I'm sure that's the same across a lot of disabilities, so if you're identifying with it, when you get your label, for example dyslexia, dyspraxia, whatever, it didn't mean that you weren't dyslexic or dyspraxic before that point. So you know, use the resources you can, the lanyard, Sunflower lanyard. Even if you don't want the card, just getting the lanyard, just to be like, "I need a bit of extra support here." That's a great resource. Not being afraid.

Chantal Boyle:

That's good, yeah. Don't be afraid. Own your power. And you're right, we've got... There are pin badges. You don't have to wear a lanyard. There's many different ways which somebody can wear the Sunflower if they wish to, when they choose to. Well, Dayna, thank you so much. It's been a wonderful chat. I've really enjoyed it, and there's lots to put out from this, and I think people will find it really useful, so thank you for your time.

Dayna Halliwell:

[inaudible 00:41:46] No worries. Thank you so much. It was lots of fun. I love talking about disability.

Speaker 1:

If you'd like to share your Sunflower story or conversation, please email conversations@hiddendisabilitiesstore.com. Find out more about us or listen to this recording again by checking out our insights page at hiddendisabilitiesstore.com. You can also find us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Please help, have patience, and show kindness to others, and join us again soon. Making the invisible visible, with the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower.