



Finding belonging as a neurodivergent occupational therapist –

Supporting ourselves so we can support others

OTA National Conference, 2025

By Rebecca Rae-Hodgson, Chronic Resilience: Lived Experience Occupational Therapy

Alex (Lauren) Turnbull, Neurokinship Collective: Neurokin OT



About us



Rebecca (and Octavia)

Late diagnosed neurodivergent
Multiple chronic illnesses
Live in a tiny house in rural New Zealand
Love board games, singing, nature time, reading

Private practice working with neurodivergent and chronically ill adults
Resources, graphics, blogs and trainings

Also late diagnosed neurodivergent
Multiply disabled
Live with my daughter and two cats in Adelaide
Love arts, reading, coin collecting and Pokemon.

Private practice working with neurodivergent and in the hypermobility and PoTs space
I'm the co-consigner to the Neuro Divergent Affirming OTA Special interest group.



Alex (Lauren)

Background - Our Why

We know that being a late diagnosed, neurodivergent health professional

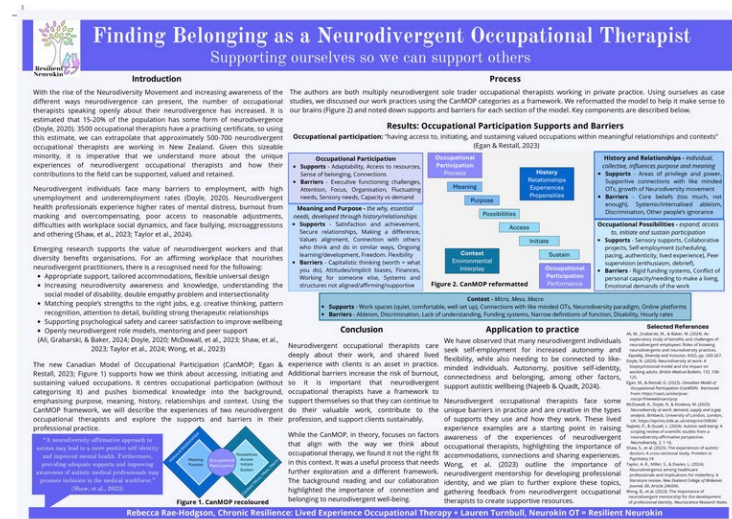
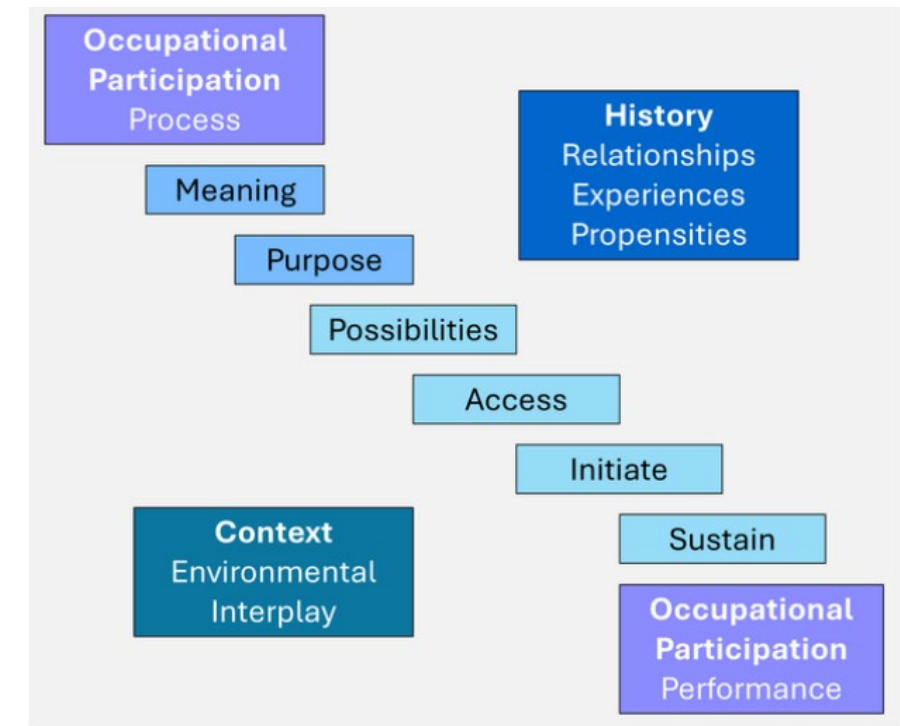
- Affirming and isolating
- Barriers with systems, work settings and processes
- Importance of finding others we can relate to
- Learning about ourselves, doing what we can, advocating for change
- Benefits of therapeutic use of self and the need to fill our own cups

→ Wanting to gather data from a range of voices in order to support other neurodivergent

OTs

Project Aim

Use the Canadian Model of Occupational Participation (CanMOP) to describe ways neurodivergent occupational therapists can understand and support themselves personally and professionally.



1 Our experience of supports and barriers to occupational participation - Poster (2024)

2 Survey and presentation of responses from 106 ND OTs (2025)

3 Further analysis and resource creation

We are here

Method - Data Collection

What: Google form survey created using the CanMOP model as a framework for questions - mix of checkbox, rating scale and open ended questions

Who: Neurodivergent Occupational Therapists, Australia and New Zealand

When: Flyer shared in Facebook Occupational Therapy groups, LinkedIn, Professional networks - survey open during March 2025



Seeking Neurodivergent Occupational Therapists

01. The Project
Finding belonging as a neurodivergent occupational therapist – supporting ourselves so we can support others
We are seeking responses to collate for an upcoming conference presentation that will explore the barriers that we face as neurodivergent occupational therapists and how we are supporting ourselves in practice, to expand a previous poster presentation project.
This is an independent project and not affiliated with a university - all responses are anonymous.

02. Who
Seeking responses from:
• Self-identified, peer reviewed or formally diagnosed neurodivergent
• Occupational therapists (includes students)
• Based in New Zealand or Australia.

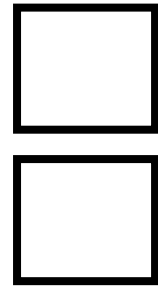
03. Survey
• 5 section survey
• Mix of checkbox, rating scale and open ended questions
• Time commitment approx 30 minutes

04. Participate
<https://forms.gle/iPeRniXKTr7dCFZ37>

Rebecca Rae-Hodgson, Chronic Resilience: Lived Experience Occupational Therapy + Lauren Turnbull, Neurokin OT = Resilient Neurokin

Method - Data Analysis

Received 106 Responses



Checkbox questions → Google sheets for frequency and percentages



Rating scales → graphed by Google forms

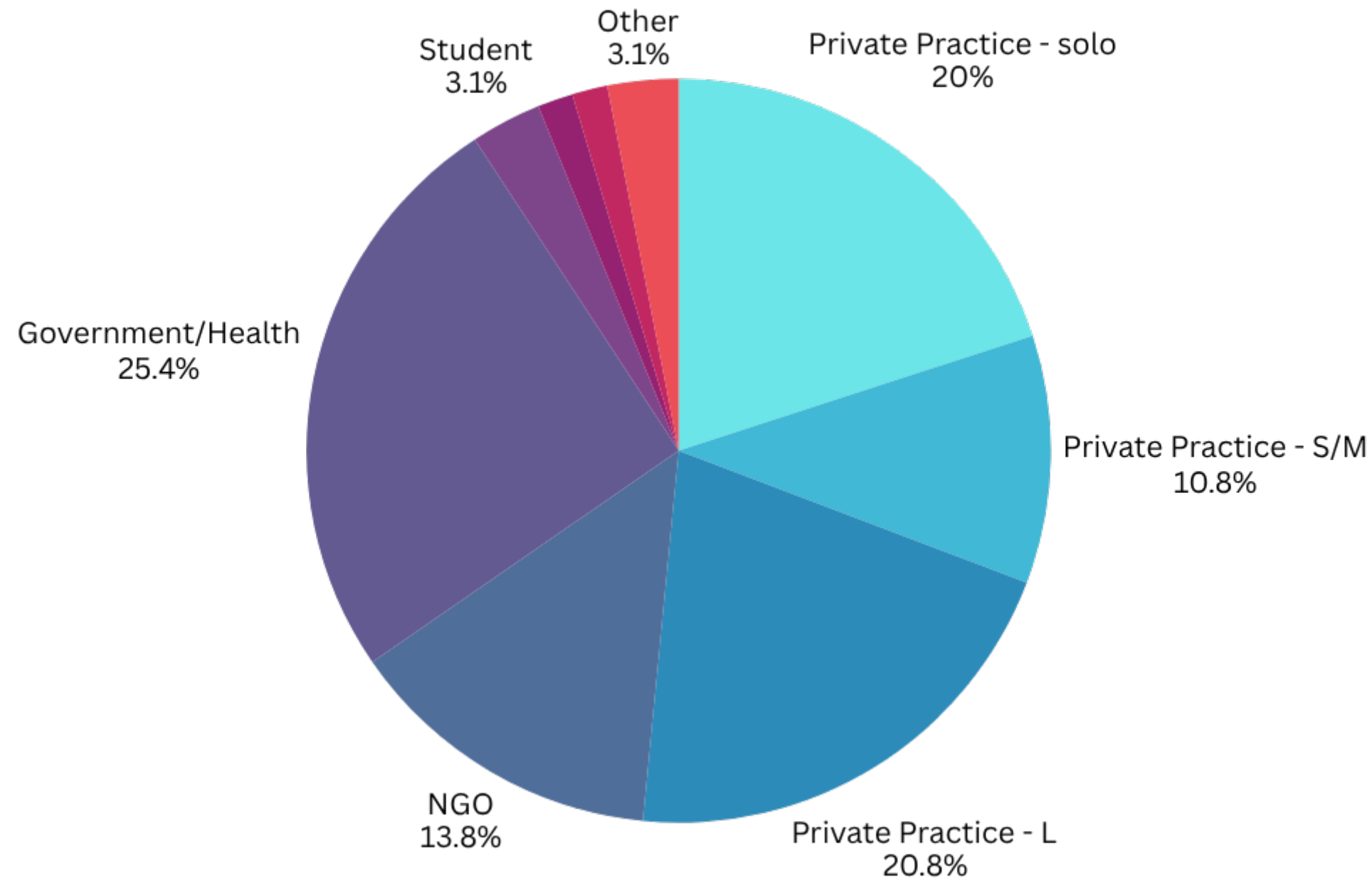


Open ended questions ->

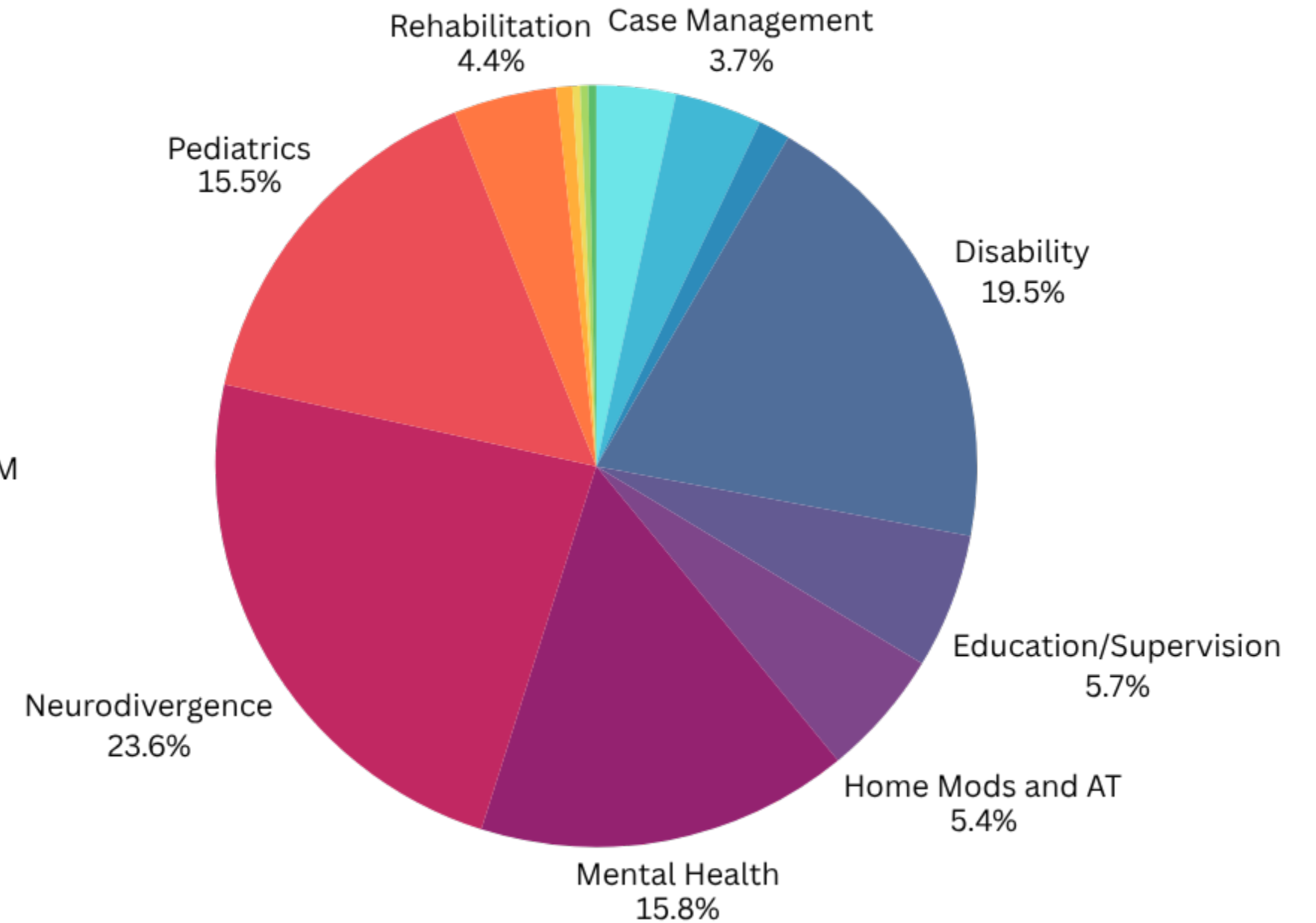
- Responses to each long answer question put into Grammarly to extract themes, individual prompts for each question recorded
- Individual responses reviewed

Demographics

Work Setting

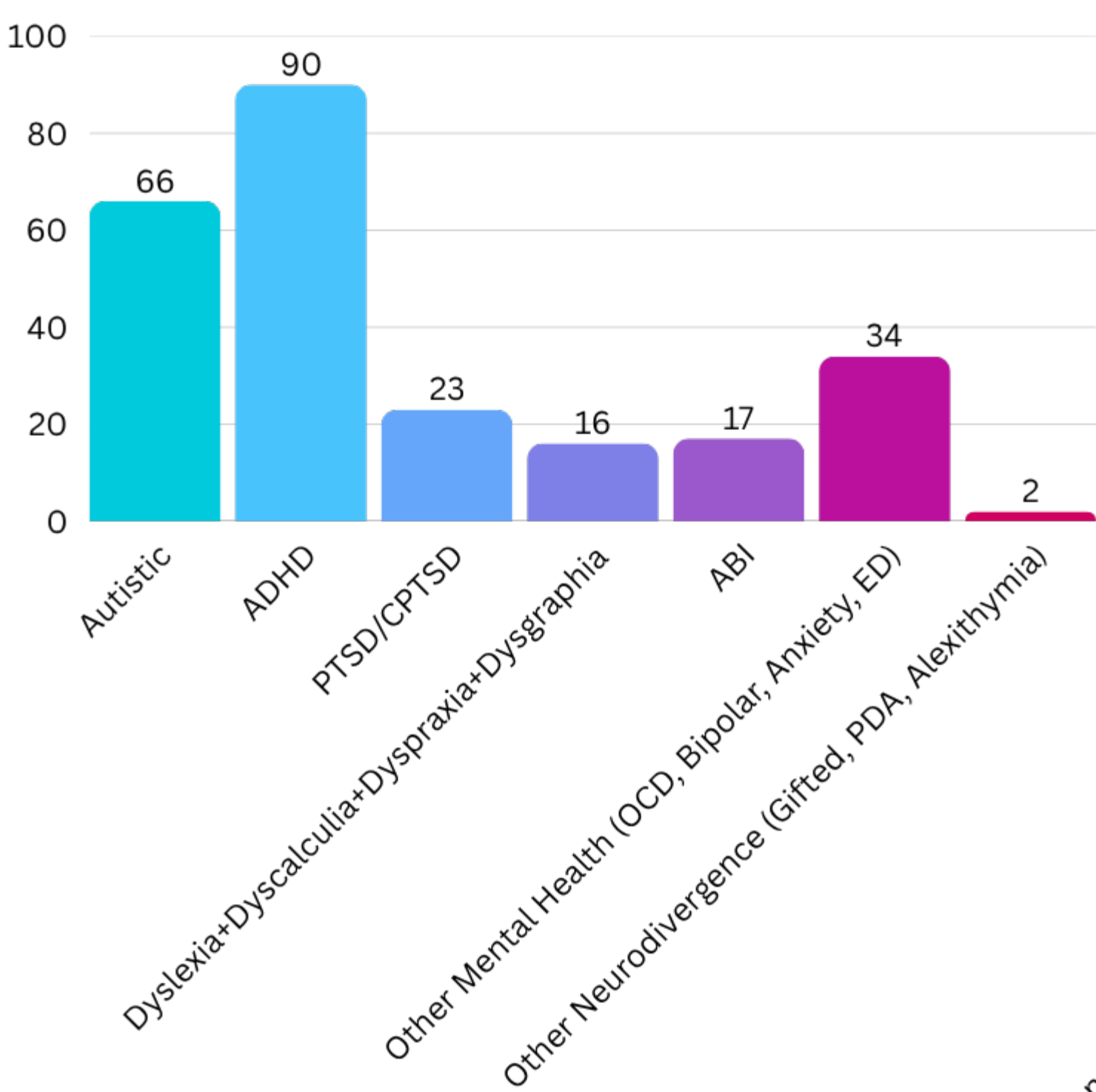


Practice Areas

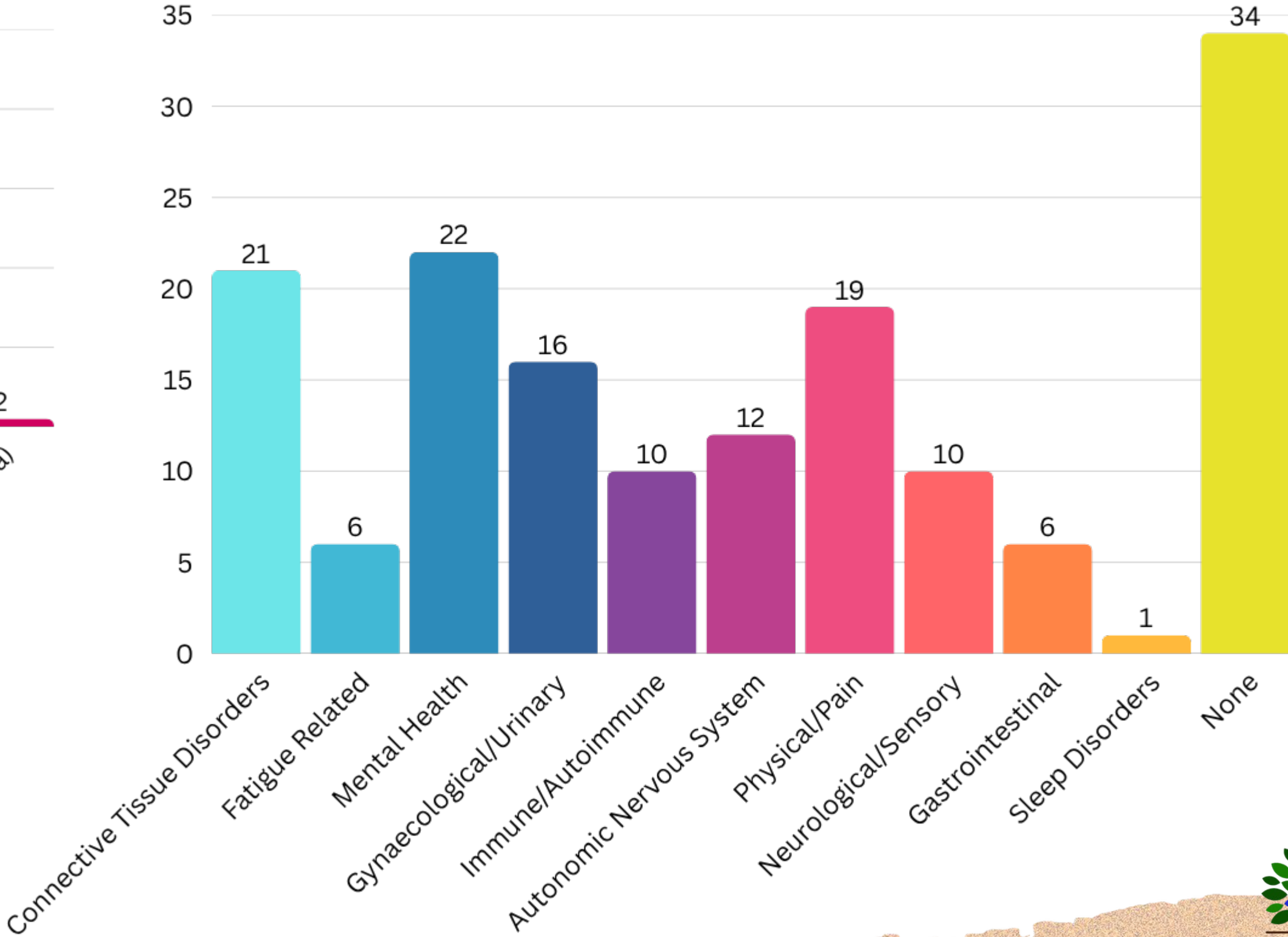


Demographics

Neurodivergence



Co-Occurring Conditions



Section 2: Barriers, Supports and Accommodations

Impact of neurodivergence/disability on work - top themes

Burnout and stress management -

need for breaks and reduced client load, emotional toll, stress, task paralysis

Social interactions and communication -

neurotypical perspectives, emotional impact, phone calls, confrontation

Flexibility and work environment - fluctuating energy levels, need for a supportive environment, working independently

High achievement and perfectionism - high standards, over-committing, fear of disappointing others, personal limitations

Sensory sensitivity and overload - difficulty focusing, need for reduced sensory environments

Emotional challenges and management - imposter syndrome, self-doubt, shame

Work process and task management - multi-step organisation, time management, keeping track of information

Section 2: Barriers, Supports and Accommodations

Barriers experienced by neurodivergent occupational therapists - top themes

Barriers to accommodations - unmet needs, lack of understanding, difficulty getting accommodations

Task demands - executive functioning needed, time management, documentation

Environmental factors - sensory, limited flexibility, pressure

Personal factors - fluctuating capacity, burnout

Social interactions and work dynamics - masking, communication, biases

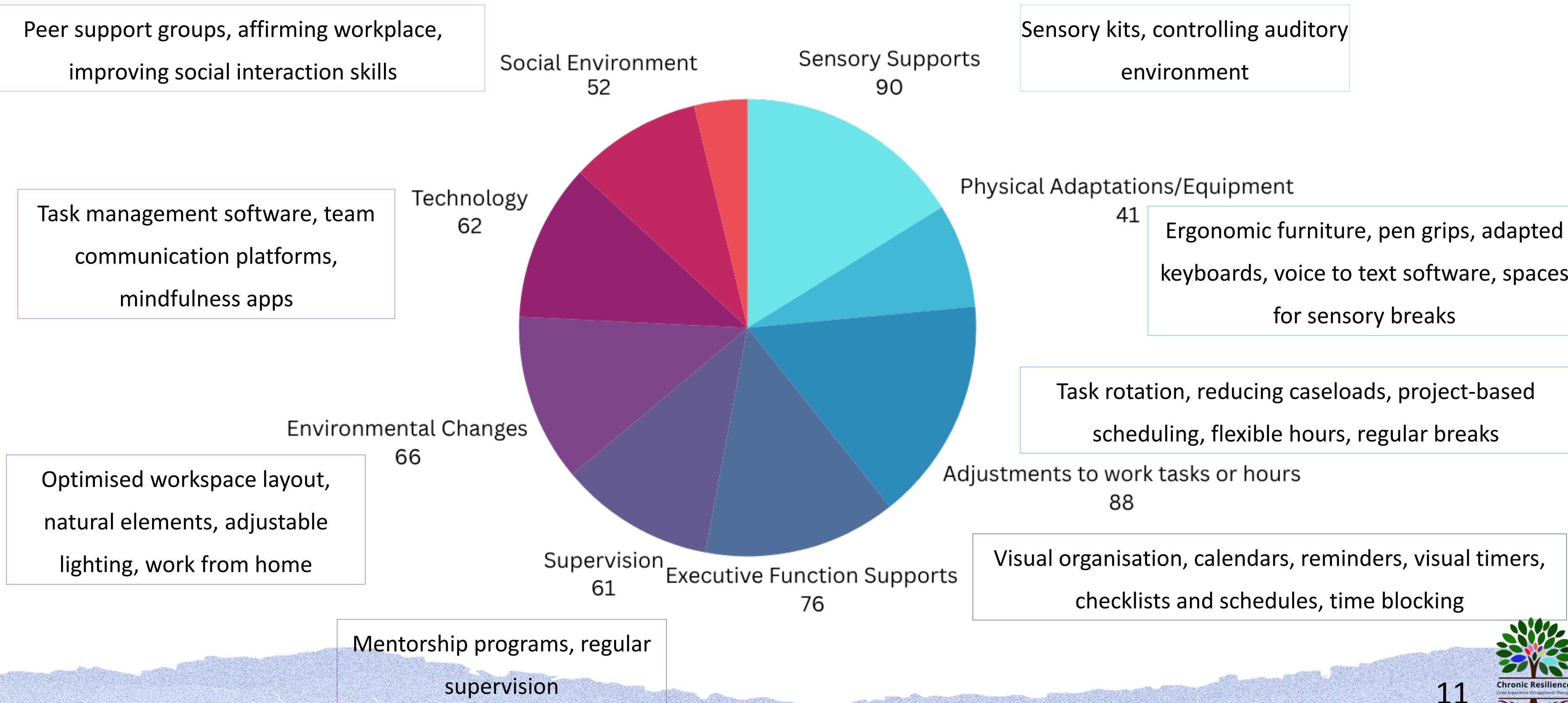
Stigma and ableism

Advocacy and representation - challenges within systems, being a translator

Expectations and performance pressure - internal standards, competence, balancing business needs + personal capacity

Section 2: Barriers, Supports and Accommodations

How Do You Accommodate Yourself?



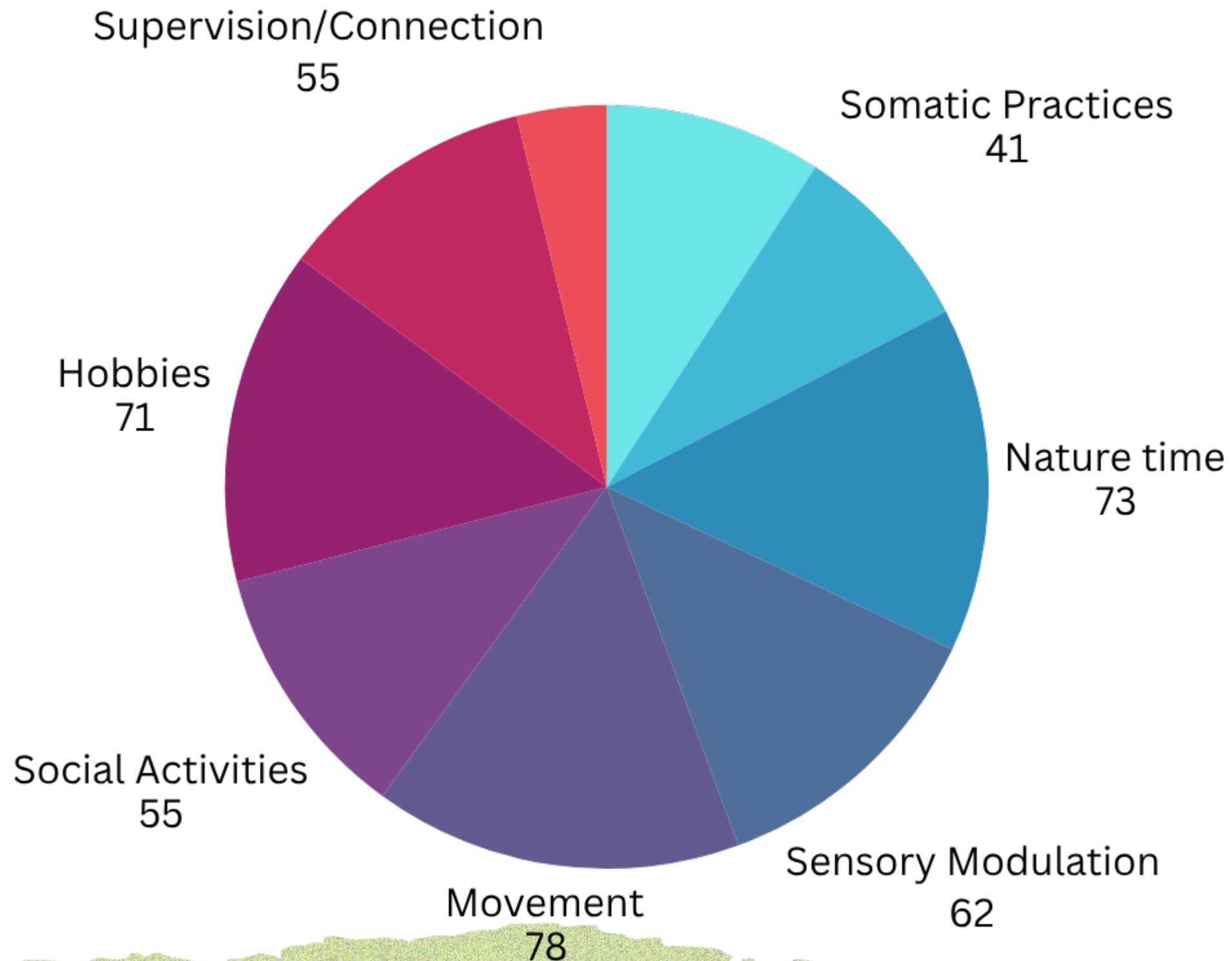
Section 2: Barriers, Supports and Accommodations

Key factors for thriving - things necessary for ND OTs to do their best work

- **Work environment** - company culture, team dynamics, physical workspace
- **Core values for personal satisfaction and ethical alignment** - respect, integrity, inclusivity
- **Support and resources** - tools, resources, support systems for performance and growth
- **Work-life balance** - flexibility and boundaries for personal wellbeing and professional responsibilities
- **Recognition and feedback** - acknowledgement of contributions, constructive feedback
- **Autonomy and trust** - task independence, decision making

Section 3: Wellbeing

Wellbeing Practices Outside of Work

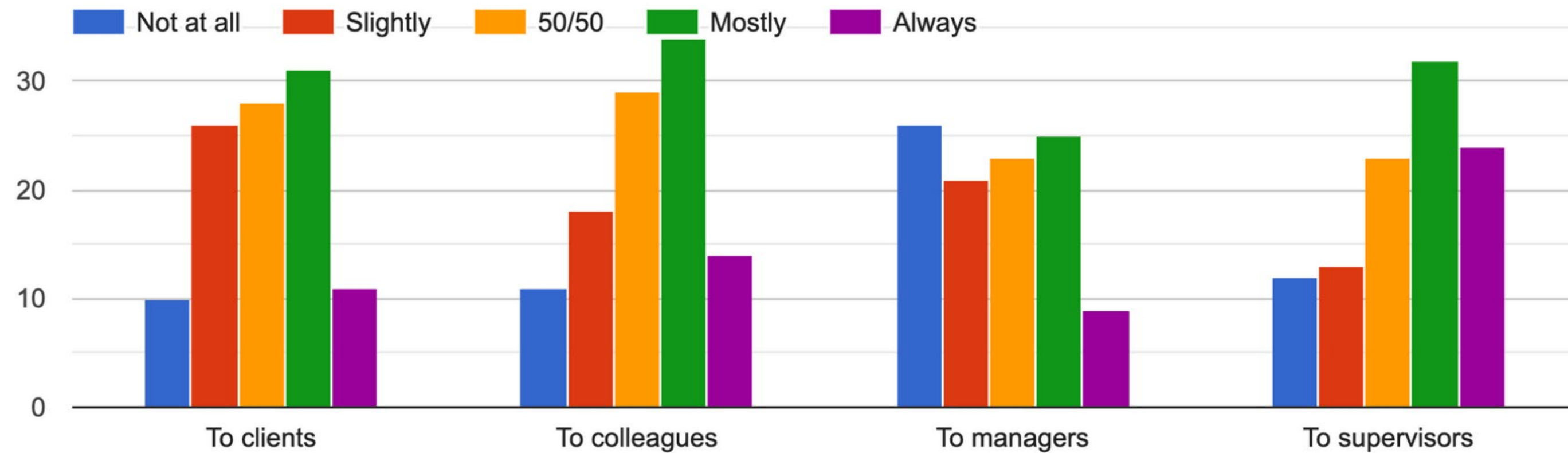


Additional strategies

- Creative expression, crafting, DIY
- Volunteering
- Personal development, research, learning
- Time with animals
- Mindfulness - eating, movement
- Digital detox
- Aromatherapy
- Journaling
- Gardening
- Spiritual practices
- Travel and exploration
- Support groups

Section 4: Self-Advocacy and Disclosure

How comfortable do you feel disclosing your neurodivergence?



Context and audience

Building rapport and understanding

Professional considerations

Impact on professional relationships

Perception and judgement

Personal identity and pride

Strategic disclosure

Section 5: Future Vision

Benefits of being an ND OT

**Lived experience and
relatability**

Effective advocacy

**Enhanced therapeutic
approaches**

**Understanding of
neurodivergent needs**

**Communication and
rapport building**

**Creativity and
innovation**

**Detailed observation
and clinical reasoning**

**Empathy and
emotional insight**

Key Take Aways

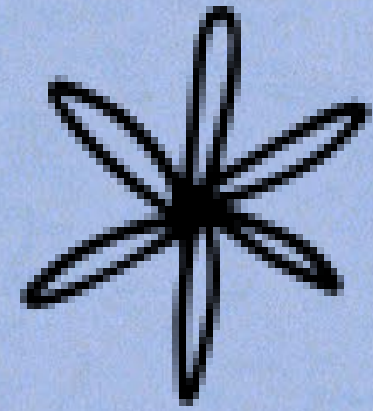
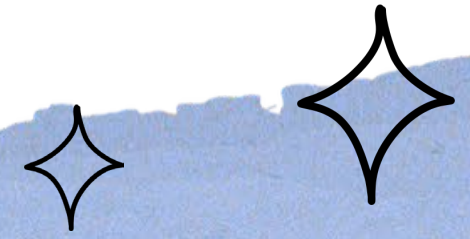
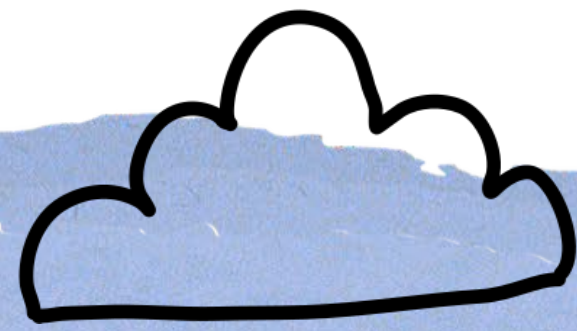
Neurodivergent therapists have a range of unique and powerful strengths, as well as facing many barriers, and ensuring that we can flourish is imperative to the sustainability of our future practice and the benefits we bring to the profession and our work with clients.

Benefits of being an ND OT

Need for accommodations to do our best work

Importance of wellbeing practices for sustainability

Reality of the barriers and the importance of peer support



How to keep in touch



Rebecca - rebecca@chronicresilienceot.com

Alex - lauren@neurokin.net.au

Mailing list sign up to keep up to date with the project - www.chronicresilienceot.com