Inclusion Versus Accommodation: Why This Matters

American author and DEI consultant, Verna Myers once stated “Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance." This quote has resonated with me throughout my professional career, motivating me to ensure that everyone is able to dance. When working with and supporting neurodiverse individuals, oftentimes the buzzwords such as “inclusion” and “accommodations” are used as synonyms - but they are not the same. It is important to recognize the difference to cultivate environments where individuals not only participate but feel as though they belong.

Accommodation and inclusion differ in what they provide and how they are approached and addressed. An accommodation helps an individual to fit into the already existing environment, while inclusion changes the environment entirely to create a sense of belonging. Additionally, accommodations are put into place after a need in the environment is identified whereas inclusion is designed with an understanding that people have diverse needs. Understanding the distinction between the two terms is critical as it shapes how we create environments that extend past basic support to ensure they feel valued and included.

This contrast is often reflected by the idea that while diversity invites someone into a space, true inclusion ensures that they are involved, heard and feel valued; like being asked to dance, not just invited to the party.