



# OUR OWN VOICE

**QDN'S  
LEADERSHIP  
PRINCIPLES AND  
FRAMEWORK**

**QDN** NOTHING ABOUT US  
WITHOUT US  
QUEENSLANDERS WITH DISABILITY NETWORK

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the people who are the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which we gather. We thank the peoples of the land past and present for their custodianship and for the opportunity to meet in this place. Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) also acknowledges people with disability who have come before us and died in institutional settings, as well as those who are still trapped in institutions or silenced by institutional practices. We take on the responsibilities of being clear about the rights of ALL people with disability and, where necessary, speak in an informed and considered manner, for those who cannot speak for themselves.



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## THE POWER OF NETWORK-BASED ORGANISATIONS

Despite current ads and slogans, the world doesn't change one person at a time. It changes as networks of relationships form among people who discover they share a common cause and vision of what's possible. This is good news for those of us intent on changing the world and creating a positive future. Rather than worry about critical mass, our work is to foster critical connections. We don't need to convince large numbers of people to change; instead, we need to connect with kindred spirits. Through these relationships, we will develop the new knowledge, practices, courage, and commitment that lead to broad-based change.

But networks aren't the whole story. As networks grow and transform into active, working communities of practice, we discover how life truly changes, which is through emergence. When separate, local efforts connect with each other as networks, then strengthen as communities of practice, suddenly and surprisingly a new system emerges at a greater level of scale. This system of influence possesses qualities and capacities that were unknown in the individuals. It isn't that they were hidden; they simply don't exist until the system emerges. They are properties of the system, not the individual, but once there, individuals possess them. And the system that emerges always possesses greater power and influence than is possible through planned, incremental change. Emergence is how life creates radical change and takes things to scale.

**Margaret Wheatley & Deborah Frieze**

**While historically known by various names, our leaders are recognised as people who are influencing change – Peer Leaders. They are members who have demonstrated a commitment and willingness to be a leader on behalf of QDN**

# ABOUT QUEENSLANDERS WITH DISABILITY NETWORK

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Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) is a strong, diverse and vibrant state-wide member network of, by, and for people with disability. QDN is a peak body for the voice of people with disability. We are a Company Limited by Guarantee, governed by a Board of Directors who are all people with disability, operating since 2002.

QDN's vision is one of people with disability as active and valued citizens of Queensland. Our mission is empowering people with disability to be fully included as citizens in the social and economic life of the community.

QDN's members include people with diverse disability including people with physical, intellectual, sensory, neurological, and psychosocial disability. We live all across Queensland, in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote communities. We come from diverse backgrounds, ages, genders and non-binary genders, sexuality, and cultures including people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

In our 20 years, QDN has moved from being a small voice in a very broken system to being a strategic source of influence in disability policy development as leaders with disability, and the voice and platform for thousands of people with disability state-wide to engage in the issues that matter most.

We have set a benchmark for inclusion of people from the idea generation phase through to testing and implementing new policy and programs, and ensuring even the hardest to reach people are included.

Co-design is at the heart of what our work and guides how we inform, connect, lead, and influence.

**Our motto is 'nothing about us without us'.**

QDN knows that to get good outcomes, people with disability need to be included from the beginning in the planning, design, delivery, and evaluation of products, services, systems, and policy.

QDN has a diverse group of members across the state who have taken on leadership roles in their own communities, in the organisation, and more broadly within the disability sector.

QDN has a strong reputation, both locally and nationally, on the delivery of work around engagement, leadership, and delivering projects underpinned by the fundamentals of co-design, co-production and 'nothing about us without us'.

QDN's networks have developed around issues that matter, in locations where members have been prepared to step forward and organise, motivate, and coordinate people who share a common value base and commitment to the mission of QDN. Some of these groups have been time-limited, while others have been long-standing.

QDN's projects have been taken on because of their strategic contribution to the mission of the organisation and as an opportunity to build capacity and leadership in our members and networks.

**The purpose of this framework is to make visible and accessible, the focus and pathways for leadership by and for Queenslanders with disability.**

**QDN's principles of co-design guide and inform effective, quality and authentic engagement of people with disability as end users of services, products, policy and laws in their design.**

**It is important that leaders with disability are involved from the beginning, leading and influencing innovation, improvements and impact.**



# Our leadership in action

## The beginnings of the whispers of the voice of Queenslanders with disability

In the late 1980s, people with disability had no voice in Queensland. Then a whisper began. In 1987, the Commonwealth started funding disability advocacy organisations, which resulted in the birth of Queensland Advocacy Incorporated (QAI), and other advocacy evolved. People with disability involved in advocacy began turning up at meetings and were being listened to. A first proposal for an organisation for people with disability was made through the Queensland Disability Advisory Council but was unsuccessful. Parents, carers and service providers were still more likely to be listened to by Government, but people with disability did not give up and the Government of the day began to recognise people with disability and families needed a voice and were considering providing joint funding.

In 1998, a small group of people with disability and their allies came together at the Community Resource Unit (CRU). From this meeting others were asked to join to develop a vision and a proposal for the establishment and funding of what would be QDN. People came together on the basis of their known, shared values and commitment regarding the place of ALL people with disability as active and welcomed citizens in their community. Also in 1998, the elected State Government called for expressions of interest for funding for a consumer consultative body representing people with disability and an interim steering committee and Mary Kenny who wrote the submission were successful in receiving funding. QAI auspiced QDN. In 2000, QDN hosted two statewide gatherings which brought 40 people together to give input and commitment to the vision and values. In November, 120 people came together to discuss the development of the statewide network of, by and for people with disability – QDN. This was followed by another gathering in 2002, and QDN became incorporated that year. QDN then set out to establish regional groups – voices from different places, and so began the growth of QDN's strong, thriving statewide network of, by and for people with disability.

(Reference: QDN The Voice of People with Disability in Queensland – 2012 commissioned by QDN's Board of Directors to commemorate 10 years since incorporation. Written by Jennifer Barrkman of Red Thread Stories)







## **Our Leadership Principles**

Queenslanders with disability are leading and influencing change in their own lives, in their communities, and in the systems that deliver essential services and supports. QDN's leadership work is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability, human rights and these principles that guide and inform our work and approach.

QDN's leadership and co-design principles can also guide Government, non-government, business, industry, university, research, and the broader community in their engagement, leadership, and co-design in partnership with people with disability to drive inclusion and deliver better outcomes.





## **As leaders we believe that:**

1. Our actions need to advance the rights of all people with disability as leaders in their lives and the community.
2. We work ethically and engage with activities and organisations that authentically work with leaders with disability in a valued, respectful and meaningful way.
3. Everyone has the capacity to be a leader and we work to help others see their own leadership capability and potential.
4. There are all different types of leaders and our acts of leadership focus how we can serve others in a way that is constructive rather than adversarial or self-serving.
5. We act as role models and mentors and it is important that we bring bold ideas that speak to people and create a shared vision for what is possible.
6. We acknowledge the importance of relationships based upon trust and respect and we lead with curiosity and flexibility.
7. We need diversity in the room and we create inclusive environments that enable people with diverse disability to come together as equals to connect, engage and support each other as a community of leaders.
8. As longer serving QDN leaders, we can share experience, wisdom and expertise and build the capacity, skills and knowledge of our future leaders.
9. We need to have a seat at the table and its important to always consider and acknowledge who is not at the table and work towards inclusion.
10. We develop our skills and experience over time and we draw on different leadership styles depending on the situation.
11. We are all leaders and step into different roles depending on context, content, and who we are with.
12. We acknowledge and use the power of story to transfer wisdom and knowledge.
13. We provide a positive influence to empower others to build their leadership capabilities and represent QDN.



## **QDN's Leadership Engagement Framework**

Leadership by people with disability is key to driving and influencing change that delivers equality, rights and inclusion.

QDN is committed to collaboration, co-design and good engagement because we know it helps generate great ideas and produces benefits for Queenslanders with disability, communities and the broader systems.

This framework outlines QDN's leadership and co-design principles, mission, what this looks like in action, the pathways, and the impacts.

### **Our Leadership Mission**

**QDN's leadership mission is to “inform, connect, lead and influence.”**

#### **We do this by ensuring our leaders are:**

- informed with the key information on important issues and that this is shared with others
- connected to other people with disability, leaders with disability and key sector influencers to build skills, knowledge, and important connections
- leading conversations, work and action to bring about change
- influencing change and actions at the individual, community and system levels.

We believe that leadership is about our service to others, and that acts of leadership align with the values, mission and vision of QDN. We believe that leadership is about respectful and trusting relationships that are not confrontational, and that influence positive change and outcomes that do no harm to others.

At the core of our leadership mission is authentic co-design – nothing about us without us. As an element of our QDN leadership framework, we have expanded on our core principles of authentic voice, respect, rights, resilience, and collective action to outline expectations of principles and processes that underpin this work. See Section 2 for our principles of co-design and indicators of good co-design.



Co-design is a process that becomes relevant when the issue in question has an impact on the lives of a particular group of people and those people have an interest in the outcome. *It comes after the process of exploration, discovery and reflection on the issue, and before the process of generating options, prototyping, reviewing, and reworking solutions. It is central to solutions being owned by the people affected. People buy in, protect, and take care of what they have been part of creating.*

## **Our leadership in action:**

QDN acknowledges the important role leaders play in shaping and growing the network, as well as supporting to develop the leadership capacity of people with disability.

QDN's Board Directors, long serving members, and peer leaders provide strong leadership to the organisation and are involved in supporting the development of network member leadership development.

There are a variety of ways that QDN works to build the leadership and capacity of people with disability. This includes building the capacity of people with disability through:

- co-designing projects, programs and activities with people with disability
- projects, programs and activities delivered by and with people with disability
- building the leadership capacity of QDN's Group Convenors who lead peer support groups across Queensland
- peer mentoring programs - Sharing stories and experiences with people with disability and supporting them to step up into leadership roles
- QDN's Emerging Leaders Program
- QDeNgage engagement activities and speaking opportunities
- sharing learning knowledge and experiences through stories
- linking people with disability with training and conference opportunities to build leadership capacity providing inclusive environments to have a voice.





## We do this by:

1. **Informing** through policy papers, research activities, QDeNgage consultant activities, Peer to Peer support
2. **Connecting** through QDN's state-wide network of members and supporters, local peer support groups, Group Convenors community of practice, issue-based engagement forums, local champions - targeted outreach, leadership summits.
3. **Leading** through Peer Leaders, Emerging Leaders' program
4. **Influencing** through Governance structure and practice that reflects QDN's values, representation to the key points of influence, State and national alliances, members as part of local, state and national committees.



## Our leadership in action

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disability Network Queensland**

In the early 2000s, the idea for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disability Network began when some of QDN's members and supporters "got talking one day about issues affecting Aboriginal people and that there was nothing around for us....Then Byron Albury, my cousin and I, were sitting around a table and we said...I think we should do something!" The Network formed but it wasn't until 2005 that Willie on behalf of ATSIDNQ approached QDN in 2005 to celebrate International Day of People with Disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, family members and workers came together to explore the establishment of a formal network. A steering committee was formed with the task of guiding the development of the network. With the help of QDN and Access Arts, ATSIDNQ received some initial one off funding and then ongoing funding to carry on its work. ATSIDNQ becoming established was the first time that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability and their families, in Queensland, formed a collective group to discuss social and health issues that impact their lives. Almost 20 years on, ATSIDNQ is a network of over 1000 people and is a culturally safe space for members to connect, share and raise awareness of issues they are facing. The Network gives members the opportunity to celebrate their strengths, share their stories with others, and contribute to the conversation about disability in positive ways. The Network has Indigenous staff who work with members to understand the variety of issues they face so they can feed back this information to government and policy makers, giving people a voice.

(Reference: QDN The Voice of People with Disability in Queensland – 2012 commissioned by QDN's Board of Directors to commemorate 10 years since incorporation. Written by Jennifer Barrkman of Red Thread Stories)

## Our Theory of Leadership

QDN's view is that leadership by and for people with disability should be transformational rather than transactional. That is, leadership should not be reduced to win/lose issue-based agendas, but an approach that targets culture, policy and practices with a long-term view. It's about developing the well-being of the whole house, not just a few inhabitants (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013).

Drawing on the work of Servant Leadership by Robert Greenleaf (2002), we also see that there are two types of authority to lead and influence. The first is natural authority, which relates to lived experience and the power as individuals to choose. The second is moral authority, which is drawn from the principle to use that power to choose. We consider both sources of power legitimate but are driven by the latter.

We believe that leadership is developed through a relationship, is strategic, and always in service to the vision, mission and values of the organisation.





## Our leadership in action

### Leadership in disability inclusive disaster resilient Queensland

In 2019, QDN joined with a research team led by Associate Professor Michelle Villeneuve at The University of Sydney to co-design a peer-led approach to increasing awareness about disaster risks and supporting tailored emergency preparedness through peer support. Before that, QDN and their members had not been part of emergency preparedness conversations. QDN's volunteer peer leaders convene local peer support groups of people with disability in numerous cities and regional towns across Queensland. The networked connections of the peer leaders means they can bring issues to QDN about the everyday barriers that people with disability experience. Twenty-five local peer support groups across Queensland came together in 2019 for a workshop to begin their advocacy around disability inclusive disaster risk reduction. This is called the Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) Peer Leadership Program. They developed their own personal emergency plans and then engaged their peer support networks to build capability in other people to build their capability in other people to self-assess risk, preparedness and support needs; develop their own individual emergency preparedness plan; and share their plans with others in their support network.

The project introduced the P-CEP to 281 people with disability through peer support groups. We also engaged with 2857 people from community, disability and emergency sectors reached via P-CEP learning forums co-led by Peer Leaders and disability advocates.

COVID-19 also hit during this time. COVID-19 has been a challenging time for people with disability. It was critical to have a resource that delivered practical tools and information. It gave Australians with disability a resource to help them to make a plan for their own individual needs and situation during COVID-19 – to stay safe and get the supports they need. This resource has been included in the National Management and Operational



Plan for People with Disability as an element of the Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus. It won the Community Award in the 2020 Resilient Australia Awards - Queensland Division, and received Highly Commended at the National Award Ceremony held in Canberra in December 2020.

The lessons learnt from this work.

- Co-design and co-delivery are the foundation of learning together with people with disability to co-produce tools that people can use to tailor emergency plans to their support needs and situation.
- People with disability have an important role to play in leading change toward DIDRR.
- Peer leadership and peer support is an effective way to help people with disability to know about and use the P-CEP resources to make a plan.

Reference: Villeneuve, M. (2021) Disability Inclusive and Disaster Resilient Queensland Project. P-CP Peer Leadership Program Case Study. For more information: [www.collaborating4inclusion.org](http://www.collaborating4inclusion.org)





## Our Model of Leadership

With acknowledgement to the research of Bass & Riggio (2006) and Beauchamp et al (2016), the four behavioural dimensions of leadership and how they are brought to life are

### 1. Idealised influence

- Acting as role models
- Exerting influence by exemplifying own personally held values and beliefs

### 2. Inspirational motivation

- Holding high expectations of what others can accomplish
- Displaying enthusiasm and optimism with regard to the efforts of others

### 3. Individualised consideration

- Has acute understanding of the needs of others
- Acts to support those needs

### 4. Intellectual Stimulation

- Encourages others to think about old problems in new ways
- Questions prevailing assumptions
- Maintains curiosity
- Values questions over answers
- Seeks to deconstruct issues and solve problems collectively.





## Our leadership in action

### Emerging Leaders

On 3 December 2020, International Day of People with Disability, applications opened for the first QDN Emerging Leaders program. This inaugural program is a first for QDN to deliver a formal and structured leadership program and builds upon the organisations 20 years of work in developing leaders with disability to ensure that there is ‘nothing about us without us.’

The 2021 program involved 20 emerging leaders who are people with diverse disability from across the state. The program is focused on building the future leadership of and by people with disability as transformational leaders and is delivered both face to face workshops and monthly virtual workshops offering a rich and diverse range of Queensland and Australian leaders with disability and from the sector to give their leadership insights across a range of perspectives, with peer mentoring following each session. QDN’s Board of Directors also established the Nigel Webb Bursary for one emerging leader to have the opportunity to broaden their learning experience by travelling interstate. Given the impacts of COVID-19, this will be conducted in 2022. For more information on 2021 Emerging Leaders and speakers go to <https://qdn.org.au/our-work/emerging-leaders-program/>

The 2022 program was launched on 3 December 2021 to call for expressions on interest and will build upon this inaugural program and continue to grow and build QDN’s leaders.

## Our Pathways to Leadership

In the spirit of building capacity for transformational leadership, our training and development focuses on both the being (Self-development and personal practice) and doing (Engaging, connecting, influencing) of leadership. We do this in a variety of ways that include:

### 1. Skill and knowledge building workshops

- Participatory process, skills and practice
- An asset-based community development
- Generative dialogue
- Consumer and community engagement
- System change theories
- Influencing change
- Systemic advocacy

### 2. Structured mentoring programs

- Associated with specific programs and initiatives
- Issue and program based

### 3. Engagement with targeted QDN programs and initiatives

- Selection based on identified competences held

### 4. Bursaries and learning journeys

- Available through an expression of interest process
- Merit based.

We measure this through short term and long term views on our activities and our capacity to reach the 'Hard to reach' and 'Hard to hear; to shape and deliver persuasive messages to points of influence; to be strategic - to influence over the long term, on the issues that matter; to stay on mission through our efforts and our capacity to achieve our vision through our efforts.





# Our leadership story

## Regional facilitators, peer support groups and group convenors

From early on, QDN has had a vision and strong focus on engaging regional networks and the power of energised local groups. At the November 2000 gathering, a QDN member from Townsville developed a proposal for small local groups, facilitated by local people, who could feed information, stories, experiences through to Brisbane. In 2001, this model of networking was adopted as QDN's approach and remains part of our work and who we are. In the 2000s and early 2010s, voluntary regional facilitators operated across the state and connected via teleconferences to share information, campaigns, stories, and local happenings. Formal groups have operated for the past 15-20 years on Gold Coast, Cairns, Brisbane Hot Topics, Gold Coast Hot Topics, and the Women's and Men's networks. In 2015 QDN received one year of funding as a Disability Support Organisation from the NDIA to establish 20 peer support networks in locations across Queensland. This enabled QDN to grow its established groups and work with local QDN members in new communities across Queensland and got extended for a further period. In 2018, QDN was successful in getting a three year grant for peer support and established the Power of Peers project which has been supporting, building and growing our existing 20 peer support groups, along with establishing 12 new groups to have a total of 32 groups operating face to face and virtually. The groups continue to have people with disability as leaders of the groups who support their group members to stay informed, connected and lead and influence change in their own communities. The groups are diverse in their membership and their focus but they share a strong connection to the 20 year old foundations of QDN and the importance of the strong, thriving network of people with diverse disability across Queensland.

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## Participatory Leadership

Participatory leadership is a strengths-based approach to working with individuals, organisations, and communities. It assumes that in a world that is becoming increasingly complex and fragmented, solutions and innovation lie not in one leader or viewpoint, but in the collective intelligence of the group. It is leadership that allows the voice of stakeholders to inform key policy and practice decisions, and actively builds the capacity of individuals to engage and be engaged in genuine partnership.

This approach to leadership requires the building of a culture that values good questions over good answers, and that supports collaborative generation of solutions, without diminishing the responsibilities and legal obligations of the organisation or its leaders.

The skill and confidence to work in this way need to be built over time through training and practice, at all levels and in all locations. This includes training in social processes (Such as open space, world café, pro-action café, and appreciative inquiry-based design) and the opportunity for people to come together to share and learn from their experiences. The language and the expectation of participation also needs to be embedded in both policy and practice.

Participatory leadership is an approach to leadership that reflects the values of compassion and social justice and is very appropriate to leading through complex reform processes that will have high impact on the future quality of life for the people we work with.



# QDN's leadership and co-design in action – Our work and our projects



## Regional Facilitators 2000-2015

In the 2000s through to the early 2010s, voluntary regional facilitators operated across the state and they connected via teleconferences to share information, campaigns, stories and local happenings. In their local communities they networked with people with disability and their broader community, and would feed information, stories, experiences through to Brisbane.

## Community Enablers 2010-2014

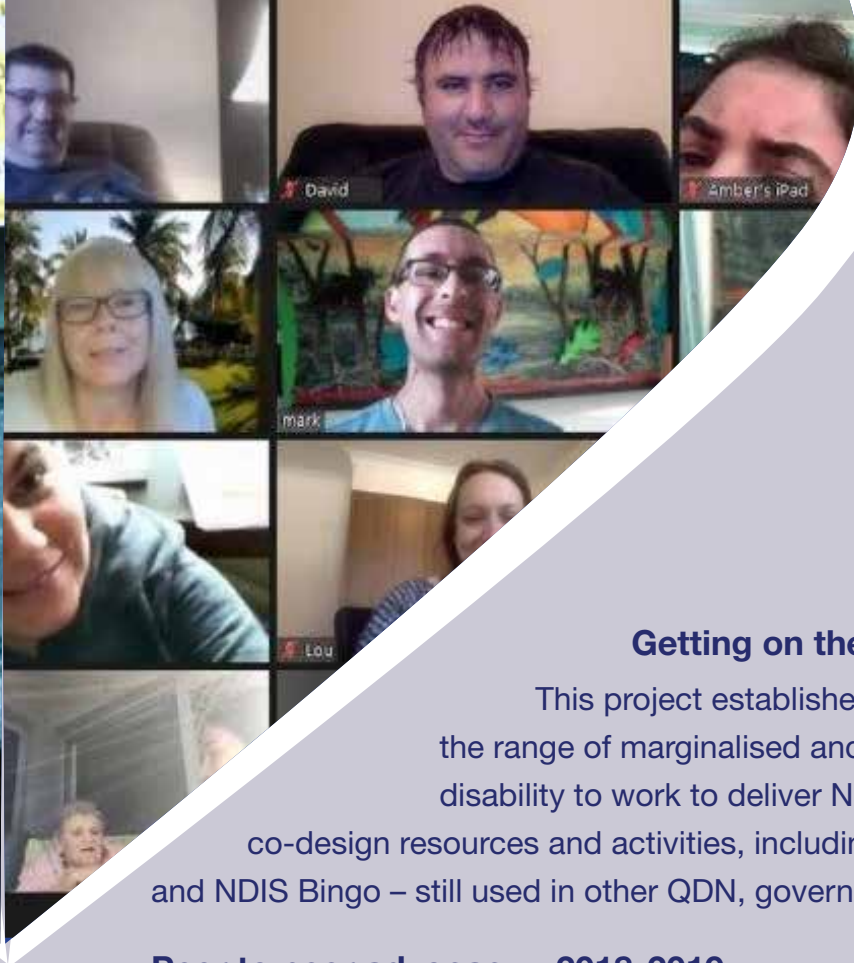
QDN received funding through the Community Living Initiative to assist people with disability and their families to enhance their capacity to actualise their vision for a life and home in the community of their choosing.

## Ready to go - NDIS Participant readiness - 2014-2018

A project that established 15 peer leaders with intellectual disability as co-facilitators to deliver NDIS participant readiness across Queensland to people with intellectual disability and their supporters/carers.

## Housing Champions - 2016-2019

Approximately 15 Housing Policy Champions assisted to co-design the Disability Housing Principles that informed QDN's key housing platform, "Going for Gold", and worked with Griffith University to host a state-wide disability housing conference. QDN's Principles were subsequently endorsed by the then Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works and are used to guide their disability policy and practice, and the Going for Gold policy document guides QDN's ongoing housing policy work.



### **Getting on the NDIS Grid - 2017-2019**

This project established 15 peer leaders, representative of the range of marginalised and vulnerable groups of people with disability to work to deliver NDIS information and engagement and co-design resources and activities, including the Getting on the Grid activity and NDIS Bingo – still used in other QDN, government and community sector projects.

### **Peer to peer advocacy - 2018-2019**

The project employed 7 peer advocates to work alongside other people with disability to support them on their NDIS journey.

### **Bright Sparks - 2017**

This project engaged 8 “Energy Champions” to co-design a workshop to build energy literacy and understand energy bills.

### **Changing Lives Changing Communities - 2017-2019**

13 Local Champions were part of the local project planning and workshop hosting team over the project’s two years in six locations across Queensland.

In the first 20 years, QDN has established a clear, visible mission and value base, delivered a strong body of policy reform related work, and above all “Walked the talk”. The membership of QDN have continued to demonstrate their capacity for leadership.

### **Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DIDRR) – 2018-2021 and ongoing**

This project delivered Australia’s first Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) Peer Leadership program, training 25 people with disability who engaged with almost 300 people with disability and over 2500 disability, community and supporters and has led to work in new projects to build leaders in other States and Territories in Australia.





GROUND FLOOR  
338 TURBOT STREET  
SPRING HILL QLD 4000  
PHONE: 07 3252 8566  
LOCAL CALL FROM LANDLINE: 1300 363 783  
EMAIL [QDN@QDN.ORG.AU](mailto:QDN@QDN.ORG.AU)  
[QDN.ORG.AU](http://QDN.ORG.AU)