Good morning fellow QDN members. My name is Nerine Williams. Recognising that some of our members may not be able to see me, I’d like to take a moment to describe my appearance. I’m a fair-skinned woman in her 40’s with dark, asymmetrical curly hair and blue eyes. Today, I’m wearing a black shirt with white patterning and red buttons and I’m also wearing bright red glasses.

I am multiply disabled and experience the biggest impact from Functional Neurological Disorder (or FND), which affects me physically, cognitively, and sensorily. I also have auditory processing difficulties, limited use of one arm and am late-diagnosed Autistic with ADHD. I have a husband and two teenage children and our dog, Pixel. In my spare time love cooking, crafting and learning new things (whether that’s coding or candle-making).

Our family moved to the Brisbane, so I could access the medical treatment I needed. Previously I have lived and worked in rural and remote Australia and know the challenges of living hundreds of kilometres from the next town. I’ve also experienced living as a minority, growing up as an expatriate in Papua New Guinea. Living in all these different places has taught me there is no single right way of doing things and that you can always find something in common with another person.

Between my husband’s career, raising two children and moving around, my resume is not a traditional one. Yet, every part of my career has involved education in some way: in primary schools, TAFEs, corporate and local government training departments, and universities. I’ve worked in a range of roles across the fields of human resources, information systems, governance and leadership. The other common thread in my career has been consultation – talking to stakeholders to understand their needs and challenges. Knowing what makes life harder or easier is important when you are writing policies, configuring computer systems, preparing reports on company performance, or advocating for accessibility.

Compared to many of you, I’m a relatively new member of QDN but I have been fortunate to meet some of you through QDeNgage, Brisbane and Brisbane North Peer Support Groups, and focus groups such as the recent Women with Disability Policy Forum. Connecting with other Queenslanders with Disability has been the missing piece, I needed to embrace my own identity as a disabled person. Seeing and hearing other members use their voice to advocate for a more accessible and inclusive society has given me the courage to add my own.

Currently, I consult through QDeNgage, contribute to the assistive technology user community through collaboration with AT Chat and keep myself busy with physical therapy. Eighteen months ago, I started the Brisbane support group for people with Functional Neurological Disorder, and am working with some of our members to build a QLD-wide community.

So why do I want to join the QDN Board? Being able to live a full life, contributing to family and community is important for every single person but for people with disability, there are so many extra challenges to navigate and overcome. QDN is the ear listening to its members, the heart providing a safe space, the brain thinking about how to best drive positive change, and the mouth speaking with our voices. I don’t pretend to be an expert on other people’s experiences and challenges but I’d like to be part of the QDN board to listen to you and add my own lived experience. To be part of a collective group of voices to educate, influence and provide positive role models to people without disability. Accessibility in education, employment, transport, housing and healthcare is essential and the simple truth is: by meeting our needs, it creates a better outcome for everyone.