



## **Mary Maclean, Senior Lecturer in Adult Nursing**

On looking back at my childhood and my school education, I am astounded at where I am now.

My earliest memories of school were standing in the playground watching other children play. I was viewed as painfully shy but I wonder if even at that age I recognised that I was different to most children and maybe other children thought so too. There was also the fact I was clumsy and lacked coordination. I remember managing to trip up my classmate and myself in the three-legged race. Needless to say, her dissatisfaction in her poor choice of race partner was apparent. This was a prevailing theme throughout primary and high school and I was always the last to be selected for any sports teams either in PE or the playground. Often I was the reserve or placed in a position where I was unlikely to have contact with the ball. I even remember boys avoiding me as their dance partner for our traditional Scottish country dancing lessons due to me trampling on their feet. This news soon spread fast amongst them.

In high school I found a talent for cross country racing, as long as there were no obstacles to navigate. In my final year I was the school county cross champion, even though I managed to take a slight detour and the marshals had to guide me back onto the correct route. That's dyspraxia – no sense of direction.

With regards to my education, I was what I would call unremarkably average and struggled with lessons – quickly losing focus when I could not understand a concept. Teachers wrote in my report cards - Mary could do better if only she tried harder, did not give up so easily or if she had more confidence. Those words only served to make me feel worse and left me feeling not clever enough to apply to university.

Fast forward 40 years and here I am, a senior lecturer at university, having proved many people wrong, I realise now I did not need to try harder I just needed an education which incorporated different teaching and learning styles. My recent dyspraxia diagnosis has been a huge relief, as I now understand my difficulties and what is required to help me manage them. I also understand that being neurodivergent, my brain is wired differently and so however hard I try at some things, I won't improve. As I recently told my manager - supposing my job depended on it I could not participate in a work netball team, so don't ask.

On a positive note, the diagnosis has allowed me to see my strengths which include empathy, tenacity, creativity, seeing the bigger picture and for those of you that know me – verbal communication - yes I can talk a lot.

If I could talk to that five year old girl I would tell her that one day she would embrace her differences, accept herself and use her empathy to support others who may be struggling to believe that they are capable of achieving more.