

Creating community



by **Cyndi Zagieboylo**

Volunteers are the very heart of the National MS Society. As you'll read in "[Volunteering changes lives](#)," volunteers come from all walks of life, and they work in myriad ways to help create a world free of MS. Some lead self-help groups; others register participants at [Walk MS](#) or ride to raise money in [Bike MS](#); still others contribute to advancing MS research as scientists or study participants. What all volunteers share is a motive to do what they can to help improve the lives of people affected by multiple sclerosis. Even our National Board of Directors, which guides and oversees all the work the Society does, is made up of volunteers.

And volunteers often say that even as they're helping others, they're profoundly affected themselves by the work they do and the people they meet. The truth is, we couldn't do what we do without them. Our people power comes from volunteers, and they're critical to our success.

With approximately 500,000 volunteers throughout the country, one of our priorities is to make sure they're all engaged in the most meaningful work in their own communities, and that their individual strengths and skills are leveraged in ways that are fulfilling to them.

More than 900 community leaders are members of boards of trustees across the country, serving as ambassadors for the Society, educating and inspiring others to join the MS movement.

Recently, local boards of trustees began forming localized outreach committees, known as community councils, in order to connect even more deeply with neighbors, friends, co-workers and acquaintances who want to become involved, and to support them in contributing at their highest level.

We need people everywhere, in every neighborhood, to be part of the movement. We want to ensure that everyone, whether they are in big cities or small towns, in high-rise buildings or in rural communities, knows about the Society and contributes to the work we do. Even more

importantly, we want to deepen our relationships with as many people as possible. The more people we can reach, the more likely they are to engage with us—to participate in our events, to refer people who are in need of support, to recognize us as a resource for them and to advise us on how we can do even more. We want people affected by MS to know that, no matter where they live, we are here.

The National MS Society exists because there are people living with MS. Our mission is: People affected by MS can live their best lives as we stop MS in its tracks, restore what has been lost and end MS forever.

Community engagement means that we are present and visible in every community; we are connected with healthcare professionals, businesses, schools, government and places of worship; we are open and supportive partners for people affected by MS; and we bring people together to overcome the challenges caused by MS.

What does community engagement mean to you? And how would you like to contribute?

With more volunteers, we can have an even greater impact. With your help, we can accelerate the rate at which we are changing the life of each person affected by MS and the world.

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Let me know your thoughts. Email me at cyndi@nmss.org.