

## [A step forward](#)



### **Walk MS is a great way to get involved and work toward a world free of MS.**

by Robin L. Phillips

### **The big picture**

[Walk MS](#) connects people living with MS and those who care about them. When you participate in this community event, the funds you raise give hope to the more than 2.3 million people living with MS worldwide. Since 1988, the National MS Society has raised more than \$820 million to support life-changing programs and cutting-edge research through Walk MS.

Walk MS is more than just a fundraising event. For many people, it is the first place they get involved and where they create lifelong connections that make a difference in the effort to create a world free of multiple sclerosis.

“Walk MS is about connections—connections with old friends and new,” says Samantha Gardner, national senior manager for Walk MS. “It can be so inspiring that participants are often moved to explore additional ways to connect, whether as a volunteer, through advocacy efforts or participating in other events that fuel the MS movement. It is exciting knowing that so many life-changing connections are made through Walk MS.”

### **Continuing the fight**

For Rebecca Kuchar, 35, volunteering for Walk MS began as a family cause, but it later turned even more personal. “My dad was diagnosed with MS in 1983,” says Kuchar, who lives in the Detroit area. “My first Walk MS was in 1997, and it was the first time I interacted with other people who had MS. I was so amazed at how much support was available to people with MS through the National MS Society. After Walk MS in 2003, I decided to make it my life’s mission to try to help end MS for good.” In 2007, Kuchar created “Team for Mike,” which participates in numerous MS fundraising events, in honor of her father.

“Then, on my daughter’s one-month birthday in February 2013, I was diagnosed with MS,” Kuchar says. “So we changed our team name to ‘The Fighting Shamrocks,’ and we’ve just continued our efforts from there, raising more than \$50,000 since 2007.”

Over the years of participating in Walk MS, Kuchar has made numerous connections with others who share her passion for the MS cause. These relationships have led to opportunities to become even more involved, including her role as an MS ambassador, participating in the MS Advocacy Day in Lansing, Mich., and chairing the local Women on the Move Luncheon, which raised \$31,000 in 2012.

“I started fighting for my dad when I was 8 years old, and I never have stopped,” says Kuchar. “Now, I fight for both of us, for my friends with MS and ultimately for my daughter. I fight with the hope that she will never have to.”

## Making connections through Walk MS



**Note: Photos in this gallery are courtesy of Carin Snell, Rebecca Kuchar and Kristin Sanchez.**

### Support for research

Carin Snell’s daughter, Ashlyn, was 14 when she was diagnosed with MS in 2011, and Carin admits that it was difficult knowing that she couldn’t “fix” her daughter’s condition. However, through the Society, Ashlyn was referred for treatment to the University of Colorado, which is engaged in clinical research in MS.

“I decided to participate in Walk MS because I hoped to make a difference by raising money for the researchers who work with Ashlyn,” explains Carin, 42, of Lakewood, Colo. “It felt like fundraising was one of the only things I could do.”

“The first time I did Walk MS, I was so surprised by the energy of the crowd,” says Carin. “Everyone was smiling, and I could see how everyone had hope for a cure. I left the walk excited and wanting to do more to help.”

Carin says that first year—when her team raised a little more than \$3,000—she saw how small donations from thousands of people over many years can make a big impact. Carin, who works for the U.S. Postal Service, now contributes to the Society through the Combined

Federal Campaign, an automatic giving program for federal employees. “We can donate a small percentage of our paycheck to the nonprofit of our choice, so I choose the Society,” she explains. Carin also donates to friends who participate in Bike MS. “I know that Ashlyn benefits from this research, both now and in the future.”

### **A family event**

In 1998, when Kristin Sanchez was 20 years old, she was diagnosed with MS. Despite her diagnosis, Kristin went on to become a dental hygienist and raise three boys with her husband, Jason. “We started Walk MS in 2001,” says Sanchez. “The walk has become such a big part of our entire extended family’s and friends’ lives. We have a big family—about 50 members on our team—who have been so supportive. Over the years, the team has expanded its activities to include Bike MS and other events. My husband, Jason, in particular, has become very involved in MS fundraising and activities. He has served on the government relations committee and attended the Society’s Public Policy Conference, in addition to organizing some amazing fundraisers such as poker tournaments and mud volleyball events.”

Sanchez says it feels great to volunteer, but connecting with others has been valuable to her and her family as well. “We’ve found some of our best friends through connections at the National MS Society and Walk MS—people we would not have met otherwise,” she explains. “The relationships that are built through these events, especially Walk MS, are so important to us. For me personally, as a person with MS, it’s been the greatest support system, in addition to knowing that you are making a difference for everyone with MS.”

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