

Strengthening relationships



by Cyndi Zagieboylo



**Cyndi Zagieboylo, President
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Friendships come and go throughout our lives. Some friendships last only a short while. If we're lucky, we have one or two lifelong friends, but even those relationships evolve as we grow and change. And as you'll read in "[The friend zone](#)," introducing friends to your multiple sclerosis can accelerate the rate of change. Some friendships may fall away while others deepen.

Despite fluctuations in our relationships over our lifetimes, one thing is always true: Strong social networks help people cope better with chronic illness or any of the uninvited challenges life has to offer. Friendships are key to resilience and, as you'll read in "[The resilience factor](#)," friends can provide the support we need to make it through difficult times. But it can be difficult to make new friends or nurture old friendships when you're also dealing with mobility issues, cognitive challenges, fatigue or any of the other myriad symptoms of MS.

That's why the National MS Society is committed to connecting people affected by MS with each other to strengthen their social networks, whether it's through [MS Connection](#), the Peers Connection program or a self-help group. As one of our leadership volunteers says, "MS is a terrible way to meet wonderful people."

There are many people in the MS movement who want to connect because they have a deep understanding of the ways MS affects a person's life. Many are eager to share what they've learned on their journey, including how they've handled the toughest times, and how they've grown and come out stronger and happier on the other side. The opportunity to develop relationships with people you wouldn't otherwise meet can add so much to your life, and can also help build your resiliency.

One individual who knows from personal experience how isolating MS can be is Ed Dowd—and he aims to do something about it. As you'll read in "[The personal touch](#)," he donated \$1 million a year for three years—the largest gift the Society has ever received from an individual—to create the Edward M. Dowd Personal Advocate Program. When Mr. Dowd and I met, he was very specific that he wanted his gift to help people who are most severely affected by the disease because they are the ones who are most susceptible to isolation and loss of access to resources. So together, building on the Society's MS Navigator® service, we developed this program, which will connect those most critically affected by MS with resources and people who can help them overcome the most difficult obstacles in the way of living their best lives.

We believe that the Society must be able to support people in the most challenging times, so they can move their lives forward and get the most out of life. To focus on having a full and meaningful life is not a selfish thing. When people are content and find meaning in their lives, they become the best version of themselves. They experience resilience and, often, a sense of wellness.

Please let me know how we can support you in forming new relationships, or in any other challenges that you face. As always, I look forward to hearing from you.

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