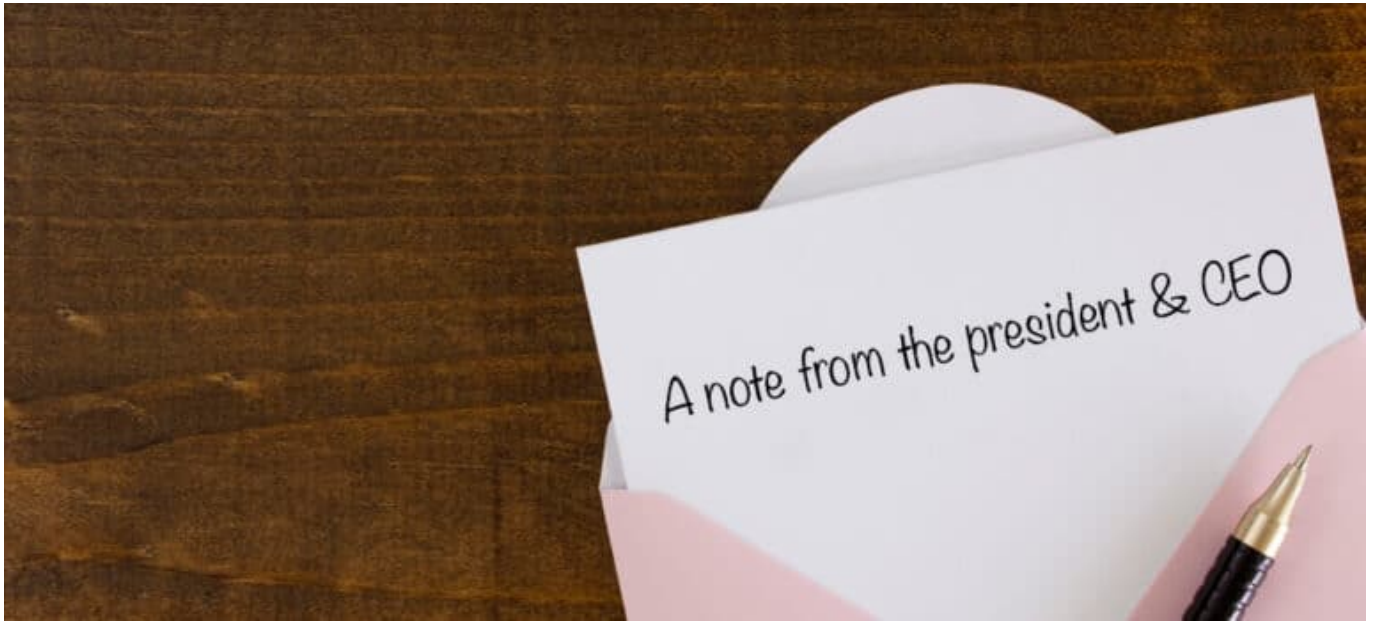


Together, we are stronger



by Cyndi Zagieboylo



Wherever you live, we strive to be a place where you can connect for the most comprehensive multiple sclerosis information and available resources. We want to be a place where you feel welcome and at home — among friends, able to be yourself, comfortable, accepted for who you are.

This is thanks to a nationwide network with 800 leadership volunteers, 1,200 self-help group leaders, 34,000 MS activists, including 312 District Activist Leaders, plus hundreds of thousands of event participants. As a result, we have built a movement that includes close to 550,000 of the estimated 914,000 people who have been diagnosed with MS. Where are the other 364,000? How do we reach them to make sure they know that we have their back? No one should live with MS alone.

Most would agree that we are doing well with outreach, that knowing and engaging 60% of people with MS is good. I think we can do better. I know some of you who take it upon yourselves to be a “go-to resource” in your local community. Or maybe you just fell into that influential position. There are more people out there who are inspiring, welcoming and inviting, and creating space for people to plug in and take part in the MS movement.

We are formalizing the name, MS Ambassador, but many serve in this role without a title. Magnetic, easily approachable people who view people they don't know as future friends, not strangers. They are people like Diane Kramer from State College, Pennsylvania, who is featured in a story about our Virtual State Action Days. After she was diagnosed with MS in 2010, Diane contacted the Society. She started a self-help group. She took it upon herself to visit local neurologists' offices to deliver up-to-date information about the Society. People in Diane's community know they can count on her to make connections. Her engagement led to her nomination to the Society's national board of directors. She started her term in November. Like so many other volunteers across the country, Diane doesn't just represent the National MS Society. She IS the National MS Society in her community.

And there are others, like Micah Love from Houston. Micah didn't plug in at his first opportunity, or even his second. When a friend let Micah know he would ride Bike MS in his honor, Micah decided to plug in. As he puts it, “For me, the MS Society is a refuge, a safe haven. I can be myself and belong — it's not overbearing. And before I knew it, I became the connection point for others. I hear from people who are newly diagnosed. I get to share my experience and let them know that the MS Society is a good place to plug in.”

Lauren Spero, vice president, volunteer and community engagement, leads our efforts to uncover and inspire more MS Ambassadors. She says: “We need people everywhere who want to BE the MS Society in their communities, like Diane and Micah. People who have that warm, open, accepting personality that others gravitate to. We need their help, so people feel comfortable and confident connecting with us. At the Society, we strive to be a place for anyone affected by MS to connect, be empowered, lift others up and belong. There is no doubt that together we are stronger. MS Ambassadors are proof of that.”

We know people who thrive are connected. That's not going to be the same for each person, and it's likely to change over time. How do you want to plug in? Could you be an MS Ambassador? Let's keep in touch!

Cyndi Zagieboylo
President & CEO
National MS Society

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