

Operational Report for the 60th AGM

10:30 am Saturday 18 May 2024.

Wellington MS currently has three paid employees. Jo Dean is our Lead Community Advisor covering the Hutt Valley and the Wairarapa. She has a background in banking and as a service coordinator in the disability sector. I am Lacey Reedy, the Community Advisor covering Wellington, Porirua and the Kapiti Coast. I have over 15 years' experience as an allied health care provider. Suzie Linton is our Communications and Fundraising Expert. She is a communications professional with extensive experience in both the not-for-profit and disability sectors.

The work our team do is guided by our mission statement, *empowering people with MS to live their best lives*. As such we are committed to providing our clients person led, culturally safe support, individualised by their stage of MS, their natural supports, their values and beliefs.

Our Community Advisors, primarily offer a by-request service. We connect with our MS community in a range of ways, from face-to-face catch-ups in their homes or at local cafes, phone calls, emails, through to video conferencing.

Community Advisors may receive direct referrals from people with MS, their whanau and friends, the MS nurse at Wellington hospital, other health care or allied health care providers. We are dedicated to establishing and maintaining strong professional relationships with all of these groups.

Advocacy is a key component of the work we do. Educating and encouraging those we support to self-advocate is always our primary goal. Some of the advocacy groups we interact with include GP's, occupational therapists, physiotherapist, care facilities, NASCs and WINZ.

Connections have also been made with several Disability Advisory Groups who continue advocating for equity, equality, accessibility and funding. Several of our wonderful clients are involved in the leadership of these groups.

Wellington MS is part of a Central NZ MS Cluster Group. This is where we meet, three monthly, with our regional 'neighbours'; Hawkes Bay, Palmerston North, Whanganui and Taranaki. This is always a great opportunity to share ideas, discuss challenges and provide peer support. This continues at a governance level, with the respective committees also meeting.

In late June 2023, the Community Advisors attended a 3-day training and development course hosted by MSNZ. This was a wonderful event, full of learning and connection as our colleagues from all around New Zealand came together.

Some key topics of interest included men's mental health, family violence, recognising and managing relapses, working effectively with NASCs, and an overview of WINZ.

MSNZ also provide online training for our Community Advisors every few months. This is a new initiative and is proving valuable, providing both timely reminders on a range of topics and keeping us up to date with new developments.

This past year, work has continued on Infoodle, our client management system, populating fields and updating information. This has been a significant project and will continue this year as we update client information and consent forms.

Such a system does make reporting a lot easier. Last year, there were almost 1200 contacts made with our MS community, either in person, by phone, or email, or video conferencing. Currently we have 275 clients, 336 members and 32 contacts through whanau and friends.

Highlights:

- Our monthly support group meetings, which meet in most key centres, continue to be popular. A variety of different topics are covered and such meetings continue to be a great way for our MS community to stay connected.
- CanInspire hosted a jewellery making workshop in the Wairarapa. This was enjoyed by all: new skills were learnt, creativity explored, and again, connections were made.
- After many years of lobbying, the disease modifying therapy Ocrevus became available for some people with a diagnosis of primary progressive MS.
- A Wellington MS client was awarded a Dorothy Hamilton Scholarship, allowing them to pursue tertiary education.
- A client realised a dream, writing and publishing a children's book.
- Launching the Peer Support Programme. This is a wonderful, intentional way for our MS community to share their lived experiences.

Trends:

- Our MS community is concerned about the changes that have been made in the public sector. This is creating a lot of uncertainty, especially in relation to Whaikaha and the potential for unemployment. Our region has a high percentage of staff dedicated to the public sector.

- The cost-of-living crisis is also a concern. With prices for food, petrol, electricity, and health-care visits all increasing.
- There is a lack of consistency and quality of funded supports being provided by external agencies. These are often not at a convenient time, or the support does not show up.

On behalf of the operational team, I would like to thank our MS community, our clients, our members, our whanau and friends, and our volunteers.

We sincerely appreciate you all. You are brave, you are resilient and you continue to inspire us.

And thank you to our committee. The generosity with which you donate your time, and your expertise does not go unnoticed, allowing our society to function with the ease at which it does.

Nga mihi ki a koutou katoa.