

Annual report October 10th, 2020

Good morning all. My name is Vish Viswanathan and I am the President of MS Wellington. I welcome you all to this, much delayed, AGM of MS Wellington. The delays were necessitated due to COVID 19 as it was not advisable to hold a meeting when alert levels were higher. We have also had to change the venue as the Red Cross rooms in Lower Hutt have been sold. My gratitude to Cosmopolitan Club, Upper Hutt for accommodating us.

Achievements

We continue to focus on securing funding for the Society and managing resources to sustain the presence of our 3 Community Advisors who support people who are living daily with MS. The MS Wellington Committee are a small group of volunteers who put a lot of time and personal energy into ensuring we meet “our aim to ensure that people in our region either with MS or people/family who are supporting people with MS are themselves supported to live and work in our community with help where needed.”

Our team of Community Advisors continued to service their respective areas well despite COVID 19 using technology. Gillian, Katherine and Shona have shown amazing professionalism and care during a difficult time for everyone. My sincere thanks to them.

Challenges

Funding and striving to find Committee members are always our biggest challenges.

We are extremely fortunate to have the Dorothy Hamilton Trust to be able to support us when we have needed to cover extra expenses. Over the past few years, we have had to request more funds than usual from them because of this, we recognized that we needed to review our current operational structure and look at managing our expenses more appropriately to ensure long term financial substantially.

Over the past few years, we have had to compete against other charities when seeking grants from funders and this year was no different. Covid19 highlighted the importance of having some financial reserves during times of particularly difficulty times. Funders such as Pub Charities, were hit hard during the lockdown and were not able to offer the same financial support in grants as they have in the past. Furthermore, some of our other usual funders were not able to provide any support this year because of the impact Covid19 had.

Our street appeal also had to be scaled back quite a bit as several places did not permit collection during COVID Level 2. This meant we were not able to raise the usual amount of money we would expect during collection week. Having said that, we were very humbled by the public response. Several members of the public mentioned that they were adding a little extra in the bucket because they recognize the challenges we were having.

However, despite the challenges, I am pleased to say that with the support of our members earlier this year, donated generously when we asked for support, other funders and the new operational structure we have put in place, has meant the society is not in any imminent financial difficulty. We have also been extremely fortunate to have an anonymous donor who donated generously, which we are extremely thankful for.

The money we do secure is solely used to help employ our Community Advisors and Comms and Fundraiser, run motor vehicles, telephone and insurance and general expenses such as stationery. There are basically no overhead costs attributed to the Committee and the management of the society.

Our Future

Today the Committee stands at seven people to share the load; Vish, Laura, Alarna, Ross, Stephen, Jenny and Sam. Six of our committee work full time and four of them have MS.

I am happy to say that one of our members, Tony King, with specialist skills in fundraising has volunteered to be on the committee this year (provided the members agree). Unusually, that means we do not need to harangue the members to join the committee.

However, we are still looking for someone to fill the role of secretary and if anyone who has IT experience, we would love to have them join our committee as well.

As a committee, we will be operating quite differently. Rather than meet in person every third Tuesday of the month in the city, we will be meeting each month via Zoom or Teams which means we can run our meetings from the comfort of our homes and meet face to face every third month on a Saturday to ensure we have the opportunity for a slightly longer meeting but also have a little bit of social fun. We hope by setting up our committee meetings in this way will encourage others from with wider Wellington region to join us.

If anyone would like to join and help the committee, please do let one of the committee members know.

You do not have to become a committee member to support the MS Society. We are always keen to hear from people who would like to offer their skills in some way without the commitment of having to attend meetings each month. For example, Shona, who has always done a sterling job as the editor of our newsletter, is stepping down from that function and we are now looking for someone who can take over the reins. Please let us know if this is something you would be interested in.

I mentioned earlier that we reviewed and changed our operational structure. We wanted to ensure that were spending our money appropriately so our members could receive the services that they need. During the year we made some changes in the way the Society is set up.

Our Lead Community Advisor, Gillian, was appointed as Manager of the Wellington MS Society, with the other two community advisors, Katherine and Shona, formally reporting to her.

Having a manager's role means that the manager has financial and HR delegation to operate without the need of having to seek permission from the committee for small on the ground decisions. The committee is still responsible for ensuring our money is spent appropriately but has allowed our staff more autonomy to work in a more efficient way.

Because of this new operational structure, and the changes to the way the committee works, we no longer required an Executive Officer supporting the Community Advisors and committee at 20 hours a week. We removed this role and replaced this with a comms and fundraiser advisor at 15 hours per week who also reports to the manager.

All our staff were consulted on appropriately during the operational review and had the opportunity to provide input to the changes before any final decision was made.

This has created a society that is led by a practitioner who is closest to the needs of our members and allows the committee to support the manager appropriately and has also reduced our operational cost.

Goodbyes and welcome

Bill Pitt stood down as President mid-2019. I would like to thank him for all that he has done in the past xx years. Bill was a member of the MS Wellington committee for a long time; later he took on the roles of Treasurer and President. He was instrumental in building up a committee that has become what it is today. Bill, on behalf of the committee, thank you for all that you have done.

We also had to say goodbye to Catherine Stewart, our executive officer. Catherine first joined us as a funding administrator 12 hours per week back in 2013 writing grant applications. Over the years, her role developed further, supporting the Community Advisors with administration along with the committee. She was instrumental in organizing our street appeals each year. We thank Catherine for her work and dedication to the Society, she will be missed by many and wish her and her the family all the very best.

I would like to give a warm welcome to Gemma Aitchison, who is our comms and fundraiser advisor. Gemma has strong fundraising experience, previously working for The Salvation Army actively sourcing and applying to new potential funders and prior to this worked as a paralegal. We are delighted to have Gemma join us and look forward to working more with Gemma.

Thanks

We would like to thank all of our financial supporters during 2019 , including the Ministry of Health, grants provided by Pub Charity, NZ Lottery, T G McCarthy Trust, Jack Jeff's Charitable Trust, Nikau Foundation on Behalf Evans & Wise Trusts, Four Winds Foundation, the Department of Internal Affairs through COGS, and of course the Dorothy Hamilton Memorial Trust. We are aware that not all of these funders were able to continue to support us this year because of the effect that COVID-19 had on their income. We are also very grateful for the many donations from individuals large and small, and a big thank you to all of our members, their family members or supporters for the donations received via automatic payments or via the IRD wages donation scheme. Ross works hard to ensure that our accounts are well looked after and our thanks go to him.

On behalf of the Committee, members and families of people with Multiple Sclerosis we thank our Community Advisors Gillian, Katherine and Shona for the tremendous work they do in supporting people with MS.

I would personally like to thank Laura for the immense work she did during our operational review.

Huge thanks to MS NZ, our national organization for the direction and support provided during a difficult year.

Last, but not least, our thanks to you for taking the time out to attend the AGM at a new venue. Let us show our support to Upper Hutt Cosmopolitan club by staying back and purchasing some food and beverages from them.