

Muscular Dystrophy Northern Chairperson's report - 2010

Introduction

It's hard to believe that another 12 months have passed – but when I reflect on all that has been achieved in this time it seems difficult it hasn't been longer!

Financially it has been a challenging year but we have had some very strong support from a number of organisations that has allowed us to continue offering the services that our members need.

Fieldworker service

Now in its fourth year, the last 12 months have seen us consolidate our service – not entirely by choice – but by necessity.

Due to our financial position we decided to close our Waikato office and recruit a new fieldworker to be based out of the Auckland office. This would reduce our overheads and better utilise the facility we have at the Yes Disability Resource Centre, and allow improved accessibility to the fieldworker service for members throughout the region.

However, finding a new fieldworker to join the team proved to be incredibly challenging as we advertised for months on end without finding a candidate with the skills we needed. I would like to take this opportunity to pass on our thanks and gratitude to Joanna Baylis who stepped in the breach and increased her hours to ensure that member contact and visits were maintained right through our region.

In the past 12 months Joanna has personally visited 256 members and driven more than 6000 kms. Joanna has kept up her energy and drive throughout the year, and from all the positive feedback we have received from members, we know that many members really value the fieldworker service and look forward to the contact they have with Joanna and Denise. We also had 48 new members join the branch.

On a very positive note we have found two new people who are going to each work 20 hours per week as new fieldworkers for MDN. Darian Smith and Jenny Thornhill officially joining our team tomorrow and I know that skills that they both bring to our organisation will ensure that we can continue to grow the services that we offer our members.

Events and member functions

Once again, there have been a number of member events throughout the year, which started in July with a very successful Hypnotist and Karaoke Evening that was organised by Joy and Trevor Jenkins. This fundraiser was very well supported and even had Manukau Mayor Len Brown make a surprise appearance – and performance at the Karaoke!

Our Christmas Party was held at the end of November at the Pukekohe Cosmopolitan Club which was very well attended. The delicious lunch was followed by tenpin bowling for those who were keen. It was once made possible by the support of the Harley Owners Group, who ensured that Santa got there on time, with presents for all the children!

Our Partners of Members group has had several meetings over the year including a dinner before the hypnotist event as well as a BBQ dinner at Michelle and Blair Smith's home.

Bowtie week was the biggest ever for our branch – with one of our committee members Leigh Gleeson even managing to get a bow tie donated to us from David Suchet who is the lead character in Agatha Christie's Poirot series. This was also worn by Prime Minister John Key at the recent Art Deco ball in Napier. As well as sourcing this bowtie, Leigh also worked with prisoners at Waikeria Prison to make bowties from old neck ties that were donated to identities around New Zealand including neuromuscular specialists, Grant Dalton, Sir Michael Fay, David Kirk, Graham Bell, Len Brown, The Topp Twins and Rob Waddell.

Leigh and her husband Graeme also organised for our branch to be official charity of the Powerboat Races at Lake Karapiro on 6/7 February. Waikato put on a glorious day and we had a number of members attend a shared picnic lunch and watch Bowtie Boogie race.

Communication with members

A major part of our Office Manager, Denise Ganley's role, is to ensure that members are kept in the loop with what is going on within the organisation and the disability community as a whole.

Through her role as Office Manager / Information Office, Denise keeps in phone and email contact with many of our members, dealing with their specific enquiries on a daily basis. She is also fundamental in co-ordinating our member events and ensuring that all our fundraising activity is kept well organised and on track.

As well as the writing and distribution of four newsletters, Denise also has regularly sent emails to our members on numerous issues to ensure that they are kept in the loop and has been instrumental in setting up the branch's page in Facebook. If you are not already a fan, consider joining – it's a great way to show your support of the organisation.

Sponsorships

All of the services that we have offered in the past year are thanks to our wonderful sponsors, who include the following organisations:

- ASB Trust
- COGS
- First Sovereign Trust
- Harley Owners Group
- Lions District Pukete Club
- LW Nelson Trust

- NZ Community Trust
- NZ Lottery Grants Board
- Pub Charity
- Orange Hall Society
- Southern Trust
- Takapuna North Rotary
- Trust Waikato
- Wellenergy Trust

Thanks also goes to Tim Dempsey of Fundraising Solutions, who has assisted us with our grant applications and has been responsible for helping us raise a large percentage of funds to cover our ongoing costs.

We'd also like to thank the MDA for their financial support over the past year. The additional funding that we have received from the National Organisation has assisted us greatly and ensured that we are able to maintain our services at the level that our members require.

Looking ahead

In the past 12 months, we have really strengthened our relationship with the team at the National Office of MDA and specifically I would like to thank Chris Higgins, Hilary Rayner and Raema Inglis for their support. Each has supported our branch in a different way – but their ideas and enthusiasm has definitely helped us to ensure that we continue to improve the services we offer our members. With a branch agreement almost finalised and likely to be introduced in the next few months, this relationship is likely to continue to grow just as positively.

Plans are afoot to get a Partners Group set up in the Waikato and with the extension of our fieldworker team this is likely to be a reality in the not too distant future.

We have four committee members standing down this year who I would especially like to acknowledge. Jan Fels has been on the committee for over 10 years and has been an incredible resource. Mary Cameron has been a great source of ideas and has ensured that we have kept on track. Denise Raines has done a great job in making sure everything checks and balances.

I have also decided to stand down as Chairperson this year as I feel that it is time for some new energy and leadership within the branch and am very confident that Claire Siddens is just the person to take on this challenge. Claire has done a superb job as our branch representative on the National Council over the past 12 months and ensured that the communication is always as open as possible.

I'd like to especially thank Denise and Joanna who have just been a delight to work alongside and have made my responsibilities a great deal lighter. Both Joanna and Denise are incredible assets to our organisation – they ensure that we are a professionally run organisation that offers the services that our members need – and even when challenges come their way – see it with a positive light and just get on with it!!

With two new fieldworkers about to start as well as a Ferrari Day scheduled for July, the year ahead looks very, very positive and I leave the organisation knowing it is in great hands and heading in the right direction. It's been a super 5 years being a committee member MDN and it's been wonderful to get to know personally so many of our members and I wish you all well!

Katie Noble

Chairperson

Muscular Dystrophy Northern

April 2010