

# **MS Society Supports Local Victims of Disorder**

*By Jane Barry, The Greater Saint John Community Foundation*

Multiple sclerosis is a complex disease, which has been in the news considerably lately. It is estimated that from 1300-1800 New Brunswickers are affected by MS. While it is most often diagnosed in young adults, aged 15 to 40, it can affect children, some as young as two years old. The impact is felt by family, friends and by the community. MS is unpredictable, affecting vision, hearing, memory, balance and mobility. Its effects are physical, emotional, financial, and last a lifetime. There is no cure.

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada is active across the country in seven divisions and here in Greater Saint John to help support those affected and their families. Their mission is: To be a leader in finding a cure for multiple sclerosis and enabling people affected by MS to enhance their quality of life. Since 1948, volunteers and staff have been providing information, support, educational events and other resources. Researchers, funded by the MS Society, are working to develop new and better treatments with the ultimate goal being a cure.

It has been 37 years since Ann Crozier received the MS diagnosis. She maintains a positive outlook and as a "people person" is able to connect personally with more than twenty calls monthly she estimates, as she offers support one on one. "It's too big to get the diagnosis and be sent home" she states. "If I can be at the end of the phone, have a cup of tea and be a listener, then it's icing on the cake" she adds. The Romero House volunteer keeps her sense of humour and is a firm believer in getting out to things like exercise classes for the social and physical benefits.

Canadians have one of the highest rates of multiple sclerosis in the world, with MS being the most common neurological disease affecting young adults in Canada. Every day, three more people in Canada are diagnosed with MS, women being more than three times as likely to develop it as men. First identified and described by a French neurologist, Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot, in 1868, it can cause loss of balance, impaired speech, extreme fatigue, double vision and paralysis. Medical opinions and experiences vary with the "liberation treatment" of implanting stents in veins of MS patients, which is not available in Canada, but there is no doubt interest is high.

The Society receives almost no funding from government so relies on the volunteer fundraising efforts of thousands of Canadians and values supplementary support by groups like the Greater Saint John, Fredericton and PEI Community Foundations. They have helped with the Atlantic Division's "Being Well with MS" program which provides modest annual funding of \$75 per person, upon application, to those diagnosed with MS and their caregivers. It assists with participation in activities or programs contributing to emotional, spiritual, physical, mental or social well being and rejuvenation such as exercise and recreation programs, diet and nutrition classes, social activities and educational training.

Chris Bourque of Quispamsis serves on the board of the Atlantic Division and is its incoming Chair. He explains that one of the Society's current New Brunswick initiatives is advocating for the implementation of a government catastrophic drug program with health charities like the Canadian Cancer Society. The campaign is open to all residents, not just those affected by MS, encouraging action and support for all chronic illnesses and related high drug costs. The Society's Advocacy Online letter writing campaign at [www.campaignforcoverage.ca](http://www.campaignforcoverage.ca) enables all New Brunswick residents to simply enter their postal code to send a catastrophic drug advocacy letter to their MLA.

May is MS Awareness Month. On Mother's Day weekend, MS Society volunteers sell carnations in local shopping centres and other public places during the MS Carnation Campaign. May 29<sup>th</sup>, the MS Walk will be held in 13 locations in Atlantic Canada including Saint John. To register for the 2011 MS Walk go to [www.mswalks.ca](http://www.mswalks.ca). For six years the popular RONA MS Bike Tour has hosted over 100 cyclists for the Sussex to Rothesay return

overnight event. June 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> are the dates for the 2011 bike tour, which includes a banquet, accomodation at Rothesay Netherwood School and a barbecue back at the Sussex finish line. To help with volunteer tasks or register go to [www.ms biketours.com](http://www.ms biketours.com)

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Chris Bourque of Quispamsis serves on the board of the MS Society's Atlantic Division, which values the efforts of volunteer Ann Crozier. The society recently was supported with a Community Foundation grant for its Being Well with MS program, which enables those with MS to participate in local activities or programs.

*Photo: Cindy Wilson/Telegraph-Journal*



***Community Profile is a weekly column highlighting community causes and work done by non-profit organizations in the Greater Saint John area. It is contributed by Jane Barry, executive director of The Greater Saint John Community Foundation. Contact the foundation at 506-672-8880, [sjfoundation@nb.aibn.com](mailto:sjfoundation@nb.aibn.com)  
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