



National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society
Greater
Northwest
Chapter

ms connection

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Understanding the needs of a diverse community

The best way to find out what a community needs is to ask—so that is just what we did. In collaboration with the Multiple Sclerosis Rehabilitation Research and Training Center at the University of Washington, the Greater Northwest Chapter conducted a needs-

Through focus groups and phone surveys, we spoke with a meaningful number of people living with MS throughout Alaska, Montana and Washington, on topics such as employment and health care. We were thrilled to learn that you find relevant information in the *MS Connection* newsletter. You also appreciate that the National MS Society helps you feel less alone, with resources such as the skilled MS Navigators who guide you through any concern, large or small.

As hoped, the assessment also helped us determine where to make changes in order to better meet our mission of improving quality of life for people with MS. Among many findings, we discovered that individuals of lower socio-economic status and lower social support levels were more vulnerable to adversity.

There is an unmet need for physical activity and wellness programs, as well as emotional support programs led by a professional facilitator on a specific topic. Respondents also want more tools for self-management.

In light of these discoveries, you'll see some changes in 2012. Some examples include:

- Increasing our capacity within the MS Navigator program to respond to individualized needs and to build a self-advocacy component.
- Developing an even stronger employment consultation program with online courses for those interested in self-employment.

- Working on a regional level to explore strategies to enhance the MS specific care that is available in rural areas.
- Continuing to build our relationship with the MS Achievement Center Adult Day program and encouraging the development of more affordable, peer appropriate day activity programs.
- Working to enhance the Chapter web site.

assessment over the last year led by Kurt Johnson, PhD. We wanted to better understand what programs work well for the people we serve, discover gaps in services, and evaluate how needs differ across states, and in urban and rural communities.

We're making room to add more local program information as we phase out the *Quick Connect* post card series. **Watch for updates in the next issue!**



Look to the *MS Connection* and to MSnorthwest.org for more details as programs and plans unfold.