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Members of the review committee include Greater Delaware Valley Chapter President Tami Caesar and Vice President of Client and Community Services Karen Mariner, along with board of trustee members Valli Baldassano, Michael Bogdonoff, Laura Grossi-Tyson and Linda Kraemer, a research advocate who was instrumental in revising the application process.

Making a true impact in the community

“The whole purpose of the community impact grants is just that, to make a true impact in the communities we serve,” says Mariner. “We want to improve the quality of life for people living with MS regardless of their financial situation.”

So far, the Society has awarded nearly \$250,000 in community impact grants across the Greater Delaware Valley. In the Philadelphia area, the chapter provided \$50,000 to Thomas Jefferson University to support a social work position. In the Lehigh Valley, a two-year \$98,000 grant was awarded to Lehigh Valley Hospital to provide social work support for our clients. Additionally, Good Shepherd Rehabilitation received a one-year grant for \$45,000 to provide wellness programs and St. Luke’s received a \$44,000 one-year grant to provide MS social work support, a position that is generally not funded by the hospitals.

“Social work positions specifically for MS patients usually go unfunded,” says Mariner. “The grants we were able to provide Jefferson, Lehigh Valley Hospital and St. Luke’s made it possible for the hospitals to fund these critical positions which are so important to our clients. More than 7,000 families are now benefiting from this program.”

COMMUNITY IMPACT GRANT

New community grant awarded

Recently, the Chapter awarded a new community impact grant for increased access to MS care to Total Rehab & Fitness (TRF) in Cherry Hill, N.J. This initiative will enable the Society to increase access to MS care and reach out to underserved communities in the South Jersey area who need rehab services.



Karen Mariner and Tami Caesar of the National MS Society present a check to John Marmarou of Total Rehab & Fitness

This grant will make it possible for TRF to increase access to MS patients, including those in underserved communities, by providing rehabilitative services, regardless of patients’ ability to pay, in an effort to improve the quality of their lives.

“We’re unique because, unlike traditional therapy programs, there is no defined discharge date,” said John Marmarou, DPT, director of therapy services at TRF. “Patients come to the facility and work with the staff through the critical stage of their illness. Once their functional capacity has plateaued, we offer a maintenance program to help them continue their progress and ensure they do not regress.”

TRF is a free-standing interdisciplinary practice that provides medically-based rehabilitation

services and exercise programs to improve the quality of life for patients with chronic disease.

“TRF’s focus is parallel to the strategic direction of the National MS Society,” said Mariner.

“The organization’s interdisciplinary approach to therapy was developed to help halt disease progression and restore function now. All our efforts are focused on enhancing care for people with MS and improving the quality of life for those affected by the disease.”

Renee Kleek-Laureyns of Palmyra, N.J. has been attending TRF since January 2011. “Falling on a weekly basis used to be the norm for me. The combination of physical, occupational and behavioral therapies have made significant improvements to my well-being,” she says. Since beginning therapy, Kleek-Laureyns reports having had just one fall. “I have learned to value my health and abilities.”

To evaluate the program’s success, TRF will initiate three validated patient tests and conduct an evaluation in regard to falls, hospitalizations and exacerbations by comparing each patient’s condition for the period of one year prior to treatment with the patient’s condition at the conclusion of the first year of treatment to further assess improvement.

This is the first time a community impact grant has been awarded to a free-standing facility. “This is a new model for us,” says Mariner. “The potential benefit of TRF’s success could have significant implications in health-care benefits.”

Because insurance companies don’t normally pay for maintenance therapy, TRF’s proposed model will afford people that have tapped out their insurance benefits the opportunity to

continue their program under the guidance of a licensed therapist. If the results are positive, the Society could then present these findings to insurance companies in an effort to advocate for more health-care benefits.



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Our commitment to improve quality of life

These community impact grants are just one more way for the Society to better serve our clients. We are committed to improving the quality of life of people living with MS and their families.

“We depend on fundraising dollars to keep this program going,” says Mariner. “Thanks to mass market events like Walk MS and Bike MS and the generosity of individual donors, we’re able to fund programs that make a difference in the community.”

Grant applications for the coming year will be available in early March. For more information on the Society’s community impact grants, please contact Karen Mariner at karen.mariner@nmss.org or call **215-271-1500.**