



MDA and NALC: Giving help and hope to many

In last month's *Postal Record*, I wrote about a family who has dealt with the trauma of the diagnosis of an MDA-covered illness. John and Sue Ellen Murphy, told by their doctor that their 2½ -year-old son, Derek, had Duchenne's muscular dystrophy, decided to pursue the difficult path of coping with the diagnosis in a proactive way.

The Muscular Dystrophy Association gives help and hope to families like the Murphys through the tough times.

The Murphys, who were deciding what their response would be to the diagnosis, immediately contacted MDA. John and Sue Ellen describe that decision as one of the best things they could have done. The hopes and dreams they had for Derek's life needed to change, but neither had any idea where to start. MDA's staff of caring professionals worked with the family to provide counseling and support through this transition.

Doctors and other staff gave the family ideas and resources. John said, "We had an outlet for new dreams." MDA also put them in touch with other families going through the same kinds of decisions and helped them develop a network of those to help guide them through all the decisions that needed to be made. Sue Ellen said it best: "MDA gave us hope when we needed it the most."

But the Murphys did not stop there. They channeled their energies into the role of fund-raisers for MDA. Both of them work diligently with many groups to raise money to help find a cure. By doing so, they empower themselves to be part of the solution.



Derek Murphy, center, with his family.

One of the most amazing parts of their story, however, was that, unknown to them, Sue Ellen's brother had taken the step six months earlier to become Branch 358's MDA coordinator. Mike Curran, a letter carrier in the Northeastern New York branch, was sitting at a branch meeting hearing about the need for the branch to bolster their fund-raising efforts. No one stepped up, so Mike and a friend volunteered to help out. That was the beginning of a very productive effort.

Little did Mike realize that his own nephew was about to be diagnosed with MD. Since then, Branch 358 has become a leader in the NALC in fund-raising. Last year branch members raised more than \$39,000 in the 700-999 member category. Mike says that the branch has many opportunities for members and their families to have fun and, at the same time, raise substantial amounts of money. The branch runs raffles, holds golf and softball tournaments, bowling nights and comedy nights. The Murphys make it a point to attend as many of these events as possible.

I asked Mike why he does what he does. He said, "First, I love my nephew. Second, my heart goes out to the other kids whose families are suffering from these diseases. Plus, I like getting the members together to have fun for a good cause."

So, what role do letter carriers play in this effort? What does our involvement mean to the families who have been impacted by MD? John and Sue Ellen said, "Letter carriers give us friendship along with emotional and financial support. We appreciate all NALC does for us."

The truth of the matter is that we never know what the future holds. We all have a choice in reacting to difficulties in life. I hope these articles have given our members insight to some of the considerations a family diagnosed with MD goes through. We serve a real purpose in supporting these families. Desmond Tutu, writing about families, said this: "You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them."

On a final note, I'm proud to say that young Derek has recently been appointed the New York state MDA Goodwill Ambassador for 2008. Congratulations, and I know the Murphy family will represent MDA and the NALC well. ✉