

Transitions: The freedom to choose their path in life



Jim Williams

Recently, letter carriers representing NALC branches from around the U.S. went to Tucson to celebrate their success in fundraising for the Muscular Dystrophy Association. MDA has been NALC's only national charity since 1952.

I have written about that experience in prior articles, but one thing we learned has not been shared. Many have asked me through the years what the results have been for the many years we have contributed to MDA. Much of the money we raised has gone to research and clinical studies to provide help and hope for those who suffer with muscular dystrophies.

One of the most hopeful pieces of information we received is that many of the persons diagnosed with MD are living longer lives with more opportunities to live independently as young adults. Children who would have had little

“It’s about your ability, not your disability.”

or no hope to grow up and go to college or get a job now have that chance in large part due to the work our branches have done. What a testament to your help!

While longer life is a benefit achieved through the research MDA has done, that blessing brings its own new set of issues. How does a young person in his or her late teens and early twenties map out his or her future? Well, that answer is found in the recent efforts by MDA and others who have been helping young people answer those difficult questions.

Questions like career choices, family decisions, education and ways to develop an independent lifestyle have to be addressed. As always, MDA is at the forefront of providing those answers and more.

The Muscular Dystrophy Association recently sponsored a national summit in Washington to begin the process of finding how to help. The results have been dramatic.

You can see some of those results at transitions.mda.org. Many young people are finding their way through the morass of government programs to try to live independently and succeed even while dealing with disabilities.

As one young man said, “It’s about your ability, not your disability.”

One woman who has MD has now become an attorney while having to work around her limitations. Katrina Gossett wrote this:

A lot of people have been discussing what independence means to them. I thought I would throw my hat in the ring since I have a unique yet all-too-common experience for the MDA community—I am an independent woman ... one who needs help with just about every physical task.

When I left for college three hours north of my family, I knew I would have to take on the role of a lifetime, Ms. Independence, in short order.

I had to hire a full staff of attendants to help with everything from getting me ready to cleaning my dorm room. I hired students and occasionally fired students. I determined what I needed and how I needed it to be done, and have become quite adept at explaining every step. I decided when I went to bed, when I got up and who helped me do both. The whole process taught me that even if can't squeeze a toothpaste tube, I can control my own destiny.

With all the knowledge I've gained over the years and the kindness of strangers and not-so-strangers, I truly believe that I have transformed into the girl I dreamed of being—Ms. Independence. Look out, world ... I have the ability to ask for help, and I know how to use it!

So what does all this mean to letter carriers? You can be assured that your efforts are not only making life better for those with MD, but you are also giving kids hope for a future in the world that we all take for granted. Imagine the teen who now sees that he or she might be able to get a job, have a family or go to college. Now that is a legacy for NALC to be proud of.

I pray that you are excited about the difference you can make in the lives of families represented by MDA. Get involved!