

Meet MDA's national ambassadors

In the early 1950s, when public awareness and understanding of muscular dystrophy and related diseases were almost non-existent, the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) put a human face on its mission by calling on young people affected by these diseases to serve as national ambassadors, telling their personal stories and inspiring support of MDA.

To date, the program has had almost 50 such ambassadors. These young—and increasingly not-so young—people, along with their families, have traveled the nation to meet with sponsors, supporters and luminaries, including U.S. presidents such as John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan. They also have appeared on MDA's telethons—often with longtime telethon host Jerry Lewis—and on many television programs. Ambassadors have graced more than 15 covers of *Parade* magazine and served as guests of honor at Walt Disney World, Disneyland and the Rose Parade.

Today, MDA ambassadors play an essential role in motivating millions to help MDA through donations or volunteer action. Former ambassadors have grown up to achieve distinction, transitioning into adulthood while earning advanced degrees and making their mark as authors, educators, bloggers, musicians, artists and business professionals.

Their distinctive voices continue to ring out, advocating with great passion and intelligence to raise standards of independence, research and care for all members of the MDA family and the disability community in general.

Here are MDA's two 2025 national ambassadors:

Ira Walker is 40 years old and is from Fort Lauderdale, FL. Walker, who lives with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) Type 2, was diagnosed at 12 months and never let barriers deter him. He attended college at the

University of Missouri and joined the workforce as a full-time employee in the human resources field. Walker lives independently and manages his caregivers for support.

"I always knew that I would work professionally full time and achieve my goals regardless of my disability by modifying my environment, being a good communicator, and letting people know when I needed help," he said. "I look forward to continuing to motivate myself and others by raising my voice for the MDA community!"

Lily Sander is a junior in high school and is from Charlotte, NC. At the age of 4, Lily was diagnosed with Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease (CMT), a hereditary neurological disorder affecting the peripheral nerves that control muscle movement and sensation. CMT leads to progressive muscle weakness, atrophy and sensory loss, affecting areas such as the hands and feet. Symptoms of CMT typically appear in childhood or early adulthood. In total, mutations in more than 100 known genes can cause different forms of CMT. While there is currently no cure and no treatments, pain medications and physical therapy help manage and improve quality of life.

"My biggest goal in this role is to help build a stronger sense of community and support for families like mine who are living with neuromuscular disease," she said. "Too often, disability is seen as a tragedy, but I want to show the world the joy, resilience and incredible potential that thrives within the disability community."

You can learn more about these two incredible individuals at mda.org.

Reminder: Send a copy of the allocation form and checks to NALC so your branch can be credited the proper totals. Remember to send all money raised into MDA before Dec. 31 to receive credit.

