

Sunday 29th August – 4th September marks our Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Week, our most important campaign of the year. Through donations, our annual street collection and this appeal letter we need to raise \$60,000.

We would normally take this opportunity to share with you a story of one of the many people we support living with MS. However this appeal is slightly different as we wanted to share a different story with you, a story written by a young lady who wanted to do all she could to try and help us raise awareness and funds for MS during our Awareness Week.

Amy and Jessica work at the Auckland advertising agency TBWA\Tequila. When they first started work there in 2008, they learnt that the local MS Society, MS Auckland Region, was one of their clients, a coincidence considering Amy's Aunty has had MS for as long as she can remember.

"My Aunty doesn't like to talk about it. In fact it wasn't until I overheard a conversation one day that I even knew she wasn't well. I asked my mum what was wrong and she told me my favourite Aunty had Multiple Sclerosis, or MS. Mum didn't know exactly what it was, but that it made her sister tired, impossibly tired – In fact, some days she finds it hard just to get out of bed. This explained why my Aunty never seemed to have a full time job, which has put huge financial pressure on her. She's now in her mid-60's and facing serious financial hardship. My Aunty never talks about her illness. But it still holds her back today.

Other than its name, I didn't even really know what MS was until I did some research at work. Once I found out about how it affects people, I realised that anyone can have MS – and with an Aunty who has it, I'm statistically at a much greater risk of developing the disorder myself. MS suddenly became even more real to me, and something that I wanted to spread awareness about, and most importantly raise money for those living with it.

Being Caucasian women in our 20's, Jessica and I are statistically speaking, in the group most likely to be diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. It's us and our friends who could be looking at a future living and coping with MS and that's a scary thought!

*So in our spare time, we started coming up with ideas for ways we could help the local MS Society. After a few weeks of research, we realised it's not the most simple of disorders to explain to people – **understanding of MS is low (even by the families of those affected)** and even though **it's the most common neurological condition to affect young people in New Zealand** it's surprising how few people know about it.*

Multiple Sclerosis causes scars on the brain, which disrupts the messages between your brain and your body. It's these simple messages that we take for granted – when was the last time you had to actively tell your arm to lift your cup of tea to your lips?

But the difficulties don't just end there – MS is degenerative and unpredictable. The symptoms can vary from person to person, day to day, so there is often no way of determining how bad it's going to be at any particular time. We couldn't understand how anyone could cope with that.

*It took ages to get our own heads around ways to explain MS in a way that would really get to people, but we came up with an idea that we couldn't shake – the thought that **when your body and brain can't communicate, it must feel like they're working against each other.** Refusing to cooperate. It might even feel like your brain and body are sworn enemies.*

*So we came up with some images and radio ads to represent this inner battle – **cat vs dog, hunter vs game.** A friend, who is an incredible illustrator and artist, saw the stick-figure concepts on our office wall and immediately offered to illustrate them for us.*

*It's taken us a year for our concepts to come to fruition and to create this campaign – doing it for no cost in our spare time whenever we could. They will be published in various magazines and newspapers in the run up to awareness week and **we hope the result makes a difference to those with MS, by making people think, helping spread understanding and raising funds for MS Auckland Region's incredibly vital services.***

*I appreciate that this isn't the typical appeal letter that you normally receive from the society but I wanted to let you know the background to the adverts you will hopefully see and urge you, as ever, to consider responding to this appeal and donating to the Society. **They do an incredible job which is only possible through the generous support they receive from people like yourselves.**"*

There is little I can say to add to Amy's story, except that we are incredibly grateful for all the work that has gone into this campaign and all those who have donated their time to make it happen. We hope that it will make you think about the impact of MS, the people living with it everyday and our desire to see these people thrive on a daily basis.

Gary McMahon
General Manager, MS Auckland Region

