

## **Award for providing a voice to people living with MS in the Queensland community**

**23 APRIL 2024:** MS Australia has today announced Ms Rachel Kerr as the recipient of the 2023 John Studdy Award in recognition of her commitment, dedication and service to people living with multiple sclerosis (MS).

Rachel was diagnosed with MS in 2006 at just 17 years of age, at a time when there was little support for people living with MS in regional Queensland.

Since her diagnosis, Rachel has contributed tirelessly to the Queensland community, advocating for the rights and wellbeing of regional people living with MS. She has led numerous fundraising initiatives, ensuring vital services reach the MS community in remote areas of Central Queensland. Beyond fundraising, Rachel has been a relentless advocate for raising awareness of MS in young people, igniting conversations and dismantling stigmas surrounding the condition.

First awarded in 1999, MS Australia's annual John Studdy Award recognises outstanding, consistent, and selfless meritorious service of 10 or more years, by someone making or who has made a tangible difference to the benefit of people living with multiple sclerosis and/or their families or carers.

The late John Studdy (19.7.1929 – 16.4.2014) was the former Chairman of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society of Australia, the forerunner of MS Australia. He was a tireless advocate for the MS community and dedicated to advancing the wellbeing of people living with MS and the search for a cure. This award is for individuals who, like John Studdy, have made a significant contribution to the MS movement in Australia.

Rachel has been an active ambassador for [MS Queensland](#), fundraiser and advocate for people living with MS for over 13 years, featuring in countless local radio and TV interviews, speaking at numerous fundraising events and acting as a keynote speaker at education and awareness information sessions where she shares her story to support various MS awareness campaigns.

MS Australia President, Associate Professor Des Graham, who lives with MS, says Ms Kerr has improved the lives of countless people living with MS.

"Rachel's passion and tireless dedication serves as an inspiration to us all and it's my very great honour, on behalf of the Board of MS Australia, to name Rachel as the recipient of the 2023 John Studdy Award.

"Rachel is hard working, humble and dedicated in her work which has resulted in making a remarkable difference for many people living with MS and giving a voice to regional communities across Queensland," Associate Professor Graham said.

Award recipient Ms Kerr has a passion for volunteering, particularly throughout the Queensland community.

“Living with MS has taught me resilience and has given me strength to help others in communities across Queensland.

“Volunteering has enabled me to turn my MS into an asset, and I am very humbled to accept this award and to be recognised by one’s peers.”

Mr Shaun Treacy, Chair of MS Queensland and MS Australia Board Member, congratulated Ms Kerr, noting that there are many worthy Australians working to find a cure for MS.

“Rachel is a fine example of a hardworking, humble and dedicated person whose work has resulted in making a remarkable difference for many people living with MS and she has given a voice to regional communities across Queensland,” Mr Treacy said.

Ms Kerr’s significant contribution and outstanding, consistent service has made a substantial difference to people living with MS. Some of her many voluntary contributions are listed below.

- In 2012, helped create the first Central Queensland MS Swimathon in her hometown of Rockhampton. This event is now in its eleventh year and has raised over \$220,000 for the region with Rachel personally raising almost \$45,000.
- In 2015, started a Young People with MS Rockhampton Support Group.
- In 2016, created a Facebook group that she still manages today, encouraging people to connect and discuss local services and their NDIS experiences.
- Built a partnership with CQ University to host the Central Queensland MS Swimathon, identifying sponsors each year, raising awareness of the event with local community groups, and contributing to the organisation of the day to ensure the long-term viability of this event.
- Started up a local MS Moonlight Walk event, along with her husband Shannon and with her two children, has raised awareness and inspired others to take part in the MS Readathon.
- Travelled to Brisbane to take part and support MS Brissie to the Bay, Moonlight Walk and World MS Day events. She has raised over \$7,000 for these events.
- Worked with the local Support Coordinator at CQ University to promote a ‘Living well with MS’ 6-week program for newly diagnosed people which started in Rockhampton and has since grown to be offered statewide providing countless people with support and connection through their early stages of diagnoses.

The John Studdy Award will be presented to Ms Kerr in a private event at MS Queensland’s Brisbane office on 23 April 2024.

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**About MS**

MS is the most common acquired chronic neurological disease affecting young adults, often diagnosed between the ages of 20 to 40 and, in Australia, affects three times more women than men. As yet, there is no cure. There is no known single cause of MS, but many genetic and environmental factors have been shown to contribute to its development.

In MS, the body's own immune system mistakenly attacks and damages the fatty material – called myelin – around the nerves. Myelin is important for protecting and insulating nerves so that the electrical messages that the brain sends to the rest of the body, travel quickly and efficiently.

As the myelin breaks down during an MS attack – a process called demyelination – patches of nerves become exposed and then scarred, which renders the nerves unable to communicate messages properly and at risk of subsequent degeneration. This means that the brain cannot talk to other parts of the body, resulting in a range of symptoms that can include a loss of motor function (e.g., walking and hand and arm function, loss of sensation, pain, vision changes and changes to thinking and memory).

**About MS Australia**

MS Australia is Australia's national multiple sclerosis (MS) not-for-profit organisation that empowers researchers to identify ways to treat, prevent and cure MS, seeks sustained and systemic policy change via advocacy, and acts as the national champion for Australia's community of people affected by MS.

MS Australia represents and collaborates with its state and territory MS Member Organisations, people with MS, their carers, families and friends and various national and international bodies to:

- Fund, coordinate, educate and advocate for MS research as part of the worldwide effort to solve MS
- Provide the latest evidence-based information and resources
- Help meet the needs of people affected by MS.