

**Margo's story is about a place where people with special needs are treated with respect and understanding and not as a collection of symptoms.**

From the first moment I rolled my scooter up to the Anne Johnston Health Station, I knew things were different. The automatic sliding doors (no button needed!) welcomed me into a whole new world of health care that really, actually, unbelievably seemed suited to my well-being. Most of us learn to take for granted the frustrations of dealing with the regular health care system.....the long waits, the rushed visits, the constant shuffling among specialists who only know or care to know one small part of you, the feeling that you are little more than a collection of symptoms in need of medicinal solutions. From my very first contact with the Barrier Free Health Zone at 'The Station', a community health center in North Toronto, I realized that things can be different.

As I passed through the doors, the first feeling that struck me was ease. I breathed easily and felt so much more relaxed as I didn't have to maneuver around obstacles, cope with uneven floor spaces or deal with elevators and washrooms in which my scooter would not fit. Instantly, I felt as if this was a place outside of my constant efforts at having to adapt. Here was a place designed and adapted for me.

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I was greeted with friendly smiles and hellos from all of the staff. As I parked my scooter at reception, I was immediately welcomed by Janet who escorted me into the clinic area where she and Howard (no "Dr." addresses needed here!) met with me for an extensive consultation. It was a most refreshing difference not to have my usual one hour wait that has often left me so fatigued that tiredness comes to surpass all other symptoms I may be feeling at the time. On to the examination room. I swear it might have been a dance floor and was certainly the largest I'd ever seen. I made a note that my scooter would have lots of room for future trips! The specialized exam table adjusted in countless ways to make things as easy for me as possible.

Janet and Howard were knowledgeable about MS, but considered me as a person first, providing information for my own choices and making me feel as if I was a real partner in my own health care. The entire focus was a genuine, thorough interest in my needs, as opposed to my 'problems'. The tone was caring, kind and professional. It was a treat to feel so unrushed, to have people with me who were prepared to take all the time I needed to discuss issues that were important to me and to get the information necessary for some of my future choices. But at the end of the visit, my energy had waned and I could feel my strength diminished. Janet sensed this and went to get my scooter so I could ride out. It was indeed a unique experience to have my needs not only heard and understood, but even anticipated to such an extent.

A Special Place

I returned for the next visit to meet with Lori, the chiroprapist, who treated me with the same friendly professionalism, convincing me that my first impressions were sound and that I could count on these differences I had experienced. Since these first few visits, 'The Barrier Free Health Zone' has become my key health care partner.

*"A place that treats me not as a collection of symptoms, but that considers the wide range of things that make up my health and well being"*

I had become aware of 'The Barrier Free Health Zone' through friends and the MS Newsletter. I had been with my family physician for twenty-five years and was afraid to let go of the trusting relationship we had built over that time. But I feel that same level of trust in my few short visits to the community health centre. Not only trust in a person, but trust in a different kind of care. A place where I am important. A place where the clients and community have a say in things like physical design. A place where there is an entire team of professionals working together to provide the best possible overall care with my needs in mind. A place that listens not just to me as a person, but to the advice and suggestions of all those who have need of or use their services. A place that treats me not as a collection of symptoms, but that considers the wide range of things that make up my health and well being. A place that puts people as its first priority and that strives to be what people need, not make people fit into their processes. A place where I truly feel special.