

by Mary Harper

# FMS Spotlight on Houston

When Toby Robbins was diagnosed with fibromyalgia (FMS), there was very little information available to help her understand the complex symptoms she was experiencing.

Feeling alone and frustrated in her search for help, she asked her doctor if he could help her find other FMS patients.

Early in 1991, with four others sitting at her kitchen table, Toby started a group that would provide information about FMS, practical ways of coping, and support. The group became the Fibromyalgia Association of Houston (FMAH). She recruited an operating board that is now headed by a local physician, obtained nonprofit status, became incorporated in the state of Texas, initiated a telephone support and information line, and coordinated monthly meetings with expert speakers.

Toby knew that money was often a major challenge for FMS patients, so the group decided not to charge membership dues. The newsletter would also be sent out free of charge to Texas residents. Those policies continue today, even though there are now over 2500 names on our mailing list!

We are now celebrating fifteen years of providing support and education to thousands of people.

Last September, we held a conference featuring researcher Patrick Wood, MD, Lynne Matallana, president of the National Fibromyalgia Association, and Dan Kirsch, PhD, inventor of the Alpha-Stim cranial electrotherapy stimulator. The conference was a big success, with over 225 people from Texas and Louisiana attending.

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Beginning with Toby's optimistic attitude, FMAH has worked hard to provide a positive atmosphere at our meetings. Although started with the best of intentions, many support groups fall apart after a few meetings because some members come to "whine and cry." Members leave more depressed than they arrived. We try to avoid that by presenting informative speakers and after the talk, members are invited to stay to discuss any concerns. Those who need more time and individual support are encouraged to call the Information Line. We have trained volunteers who return calls left on the answering machine. Besides providing a compassionate ear, phone volunteers also give referrals to doctors, lawyers, and other community resources.

*FMAH founder Toby Robbins (L) accepts thanks from new president, Mary Harper (R).*



We are funded by individual and corporate donations, and by the sale of meeting videos, books, FMAH t-shirts, and our own *Strength Through Movement* exercise video. Since most fibromyalgia patients are not big exercise fans,

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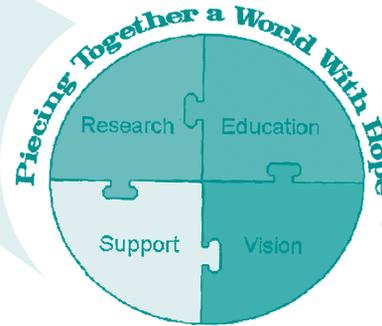


## FMS Spotlight on Houston *continued*

we decided to make a video that would encourage people to do simple movements throughout the day. We teamed up with fitness professional Leslee Cross, MS, who designed easy exercises that could be done in bed, while working in the kitchen, at the computer, or even while sitting in your car. The video stars five members of FMAH, and is easy to follow. All of these items are available on our website, [www.fmah.org](http://www.fmah.org).

Toby retired as president in 2001, and I have been trying since then to maintain the very high standards that she set for the organization. We are all volunteers who work from our homes. I'm constantly amazed at our members' dedication to keeping the Association functioning, and grateful to be a part of such a fine organization.

*Mary Harper is a retired social worker who is now a full-time volunteer with FMAH. She likes volunteering as she can take a nap without guilt and work on her own time. Mary may be reached at [FMAHouston@yahoo.com](mailto:FMAHouston@yahoo.com) or FMAH, P.O. Box 541742, Houston, TX 77254-1742.*



**FIBROMYALGIA  
ASSOCIATION  
OF HOUSTON**

*NOTE: The Houston group closed its support group doors in the spring of 2017 after 16 years of educating, encouraging and helping those with fibromyalgia. Thanks to retiring President Mary Harper and founder Toby Robbins for a job well done.*

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