Our vision is a world in which every person with MS is empowered to take control of their health, is making informed lifestyle choices, and living a full and healthy life.

The need for our support and realistic hope of leading a full life with MS that our evidence-based OMS self-management program provides has never been greater. 2.8 million people are living with MS worldwide — many will experience progressive disability over time. The number is increasing. 75% of the risk of developing MS is linked to environmental and lifestyle factors. We believe that there are actions that everyone can take to improve their MS symptoms, and this is the approach that Overcoming MS champions.

Our impact report shows how responsive we are to our community’s changing needs and the world in which we live. We want to do more and better so that every person living with MS feels informed, supported and empowered to lead a healthy life.

We are incredibly grateful to every one of our supporters who make our work possible. So, on behalf of Overcoming MS, a huge thank you to all our volunteers, fundraisers and donors. We look forward to having an even more significant impact across communities worldwide together in the years to come.”

Grazina Berry, CEO of OMS

2020 has been an important year of transition for Overcoming MS. In the middle of the year, we farewelled our founding CEO Gary McMahon after he stepped down after eight years at the helm. We welcomed our new Chief Executive, Grazina Berry, who promptly conducted an in-depth and thorough stakeholder analysis bringing together ideas from all areas of the MS community. This work resulted in the Board of Trustees approving our new three-year strategic framework.

Our team, led by Grazina, has worked tirelessly to develop effective new plans that will enable even more people with MS to access and be empowered by the Overcoming MS program and the healthy lifestyle changes that we know benefit so many. This 2020 Impact Report provides, through the lens of our new strategic goals, an overview of the milestones achieved since 2020.

Achievements have taken place within a backdrop of COVID-19, and like so many in the charity sector, we have faced significant unforeseen challenges. Our priorities changed overnight as we responded to the emerging needs of the MS community. As our community reported increased isolation and concerns about disruption in healthcare services, we swiftly focused on growing our digital capability and achieved much in this area.”

Linda Bloom, OMS Chair

The OMS program has given me a level of confidence that I thought I’d never get back
About Overcoming MS

WHO WE ARE
Overcoming MS is the world’s leading multiple sclerosis healthy lifestyle charity.

We focus on sharing the evidence behind the OMS program so people can make practical everyday changes that can help improve their MS.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM
The Overcoming MS program focuses upon the everyday choices that people make as part of a healthy lifestyle. This includes following a plant-based whole food diet with seafood, exercising, supplementing with vitamin D and stress management.

It draws upon the growing scientific evidence showing that the lifestyle changes promoted in the OMS program can improve health outcomes for people with MS.

OUR VISION
Our vision is that everyone with MS feels empowered to take control of their health, is making informed lifestyle choices and is living a full and healthy life.

“Knowing that there was hope, something I could do myself, was game changing for me.”
— Facebook comment, 2020

OUR AIMS

Inform
We ensure people affected by MS are fully informed about evidence-based ways to help self-manage multiple sclerosis.

Support
We help people living with MS to feel supported through OMS Circles, our growing global network of volunteer community groups.

Empower
We advocate for and with people living with MS to demonstrate how self-management and lifestyle choices are a vital part of living a full life. We campaign and influence policymakers worldwide to recognise that lifestyle is a key component of long-term health for people with MS.

Collaborate
We support and contribute to the growing body of evidence around lifestyle choices and self-management of MS to help influence and create change amongst healthcare professionals and policymakers. We work in partnerships to create genuine and sustainable benefits for people living with MS.
Recap 2012–2019

2012
Overcoming MS charity set up by Linda Bloom.

2013
First UK conference and residential retreat in England.
Free OMS book scheme begins for the UK.

2014
One day information events held around the UK.
Charity begins funding open access research projects at the Neuroepidemiology Unit (NEU) at the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

2015
Registered as charity in Australia and the USA.
First European retreats in Ireland and Austria.
6 residential retreats in England, Scotland and Wales.

2016
Free book scheme extends to Ireland.
UK conference in England.
First US events, a three-city tour of Boston, New York and Los Angeles.

2017
UK conference in England.
Cookbook published.

2018
UK conference held in Scotland.
Event at House of Commons in London.
Living Well with MS podcast launches.
Retreats held in Wales, England, and Australia (2 in Melbourne).

2019
UK conference held in Northern Ireland.
OMS Circles begin with 20 Circles.
Our year in numbers

Inform

PODCAST
75,284 unique downloads
29 episodes, 100% iTunes rating 4 and 5 star

WEBINARS
5 webinars, 434 people attended from 55 countries.
245 questions answered, 90% would like to attend more in the future
2,000+ replays

BOOK SCHEME
1,007 free books in UK and Ireland
1,815 e-books in the USA

Support groups

OMS CIRCLES
81 circles across 24 countries
2,100 members

Digital support

WEBSITE
31,000 website users monthly
1,380,471 web page views

E-NEWSLETTER
19,500+ people subscribed to monthly e-newsletter

SOCIAL MEDIA
27,962 Facebook followers
2,373 Twitter and 11,543 Instagram followers
5. Inform

We ensure people affected by MS are fully informed about evidence-based ways to help self-manage multiple sclerosis.

5.1 PODCAST:

In January 2020, there were 850,000 active podcasts, and fewer than twenty focus solely upon multiple sclerosis. Our Living Well with MS podcast aims to be informative and inspiring to help people with multiple sclerosis make healthier lifestyle choices.

Hosted by our volunteer Geoff Allix since we launched in 2019, the podcast has a growing number of listeners worldwide. Over 2020 there were 75,284 unique downloads in total, with an average of 2,596 unique downloads per episode.

Industry research states that 90% of podcasts have fewer than ten ratings. Living Well with MS has more than 45 reviews on iTunes with 100% rating it 4/5 or 5/5. It is ranked within the top 20% of all podcasts by listenership.

We produced 17 full-length Living Well with MS episodes in 2020, interviewing scientists, fitness specialists and nutritionists. In response to the pandemic, we also produced a series of 12 shorter episodes called Coffee Break. These were conversations between Geoff and other people with MS sharing their experiences. These were conversations between Geoff and other people with MS sharing their experiences, including Johanna Lahr from Berlin, Germany.

Subscribe so you never miss an episode on all major podcast platforms, including Stitcher and iTunes. You can also read the show notes for information and useful links at overcomingms.org/podcast.

In 2021 we will be welcoming back our Coffee Break series and season three of Living Well with MS. There will be a new special series too called Ask Jack with professional chef Jack McNulty, who will be answering all your food-related questions.

— Alex, producer of Living Well with MS podcast

“Next Steps”}

“...The OMS program has given me hope.”

— Johanna Lahr, Coffee Break guest episode 6

“The Overcoming MS podcast is invaluable for those of us with difficulty reading and foggy brain.”

— Facebook comment 2020
5.2 WEBSITE:
We focus on providing practical digital resources to help people with MS follow the healthy lifestyle at the core of the OMS program that is evidenced to help improve their condition.

Wherever possible, we develop content together with our volunteer community including blogs, recipes, meditation and exercise guides.

The Overcoming MS team produced four times more e-newsletters in response to the pandemic, compared to 2019, to provide regular contact for 19,500 people with MS, and share news and content. Overcoming MS website users averaged 31,000 every month over 2020. There were 1,380,471 web page views in total during the year.

Queries from the OMS community became more complex because of the pandemic. People with MS could not easily access their healthcare teams, with essential neurological and physiotherapy appointments cancelled. Over 15,000 people are registered on our online forum, moderated by a team of volunteers, provided advice and support to some 15,000 forum members. We also created an extensive FAQ section on the website to help answer the increasing number of complex queries. We worked with volunteers who provided subtitles for many of our videos to help increase our information accessibility.

5.3 BOOK:
The Overcoming MS book, written by Professor Jelinek, is a valuable and popular guide for people with MS, to help them self-manage their condition.

The book, and the Overcoming MS program overall, is the product of pioneering work by Professor George Jelinek and the Neuroepidemiology Unit (NEU) of the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne, Australia. Its evidence is broad-based and incorporates over 1,000 research studies from some of the world’s leading medical journals.

In 2020, we distributed 1,007 free books in the UK and Ireland supported by generous funding from a private individual donor. We also trialled a free e-book project in the US and provided 1,815 e-books.

In 2020 we found that people requested fewer books due to the pandemic. With frequent office closures and postal delays, it was more challenging to deliver books quickly too. We have made improvements including outsourcing our orders to help us work more efficiently in 2021.

— Kaur, Executive Assistant

NEXT STEPS
“Overcoming MS is to me a revelation, an education, and an inspiration!”
— Facebook comment 2020

“Overcoming MS is to me a revelation, an education, and an inspiration!”
— Facebook comment 2020

“I felt powerless with my MS diagnosis for almost three years. Then I found Overcoming MS and ordered the book. I’d stop reading every few pages to tell my husband some new fact that was blowing my mind. Overcoming MS was the hand that reached out to pull me up, and now, I have somewhere to turn.”
— Ashley

NEXT STEPS
“We will be reviewing our existing information to make sure it can be more accessible to people with MS and their families across diverse communities.”
— Lucy, Digital Manager

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— Ashley
5.4 WEBINAR:

Pre-pandemic, we ran popular face-to-face events worldwide providing information and support for people with MS, to help them follow the OMS program.

Like most charities, we had to cancel all our planned 2020 events. These events were our annual UK conference, a series of one-day workshops and four week-long residential retreats.

In response to the pandemic, we launched an interactive webinar series called Refresh with OMS in May 2020. The five webinar sessions were held live with an expert speaker followed by a Q&A. We asked our fantastic Overcoming MS facilitators, who would typically run our traditional events, to help.

1. Resilience
Dr Rachael Hunter is a Chartered Clinical Psychologist. She works as a Senior Lecturer at Swansea University, Wales, where she is involved in research exploring how people respond to illness. Rachael has MS and is passionate about the benefits of the Overcoming MS program. Dr Hunter presented on the topic of resilience and how best to follow the Overcoming MS program during COVID-19.

2. Diet and nutrition
Sam Josephs is a highly qualified Nutritional Therapist with a private practice in North London. Sam guest lectures at the UK College of Nutrition and Health, and the Institute of Optimum Nutrition. Her husband’s MS diagnosis nearly twenty years ago helps provide her with valuable insight to help many others with MS. Sam covered healthy eating at home, including how the OMS dietary guidelines support the immune system.

3. Stress management
Phil Startin was diagnosed with Primary Progressive MS in 2007, is a trustee for MS-UK and has been following the Overcoming MS program since 2011. Phil now teaches mindfulness-based stress reduction courses after a successful career as a management consultant. Phil talked about reducing stress through meditation and mindfulness.

4. Exercise
Veronique Gauthier-Simmon is an OMS facilitator, qualified yoga instructor and yoga therapist. Veronique was diagnosed with MS at the age of 34, but through the Overcoming MS Program and her love of exercise found a way to make staying fit a meaningful part of her life. She presented exercises that you can do at, or close to, home.

434 people attended the webinars from 55 countries worldwide, from Canada and the Netherlands to New Zealand. In total, we produced 357 minutes of content and had over 2,000 replays. We answered 245 questions from people keen to understand more about healthier choices with MS.

“It was brilliant. The presenters were informed and passionate. I felt good knowing there are people like this with MS, advocating and taking the time to help others. My deepest thanks!”

— Webinar feedback

WEBINARS
434 people attended the webinars from 55 countries worldwide, from Canada and the Netherlands to New Zealand. In total, we produced 357 minutes of content and had over 2,000 replays. We answered 245 questions from people keen to understand more about healthier choices with MS.

96% rated the quality of information as high or very high
81% said they felt more informed
63% felt better supported
90% would like to attend a future webinar

NEXT STEPS
“Overcoming MS webinars are here to stay, even once face-to-face events become possible. We plan to develop more free sessions for 2021 and beyond. You can also watch the Refresh with OMS replays at overcomingms.org/resources/refresh-oms-webinars”

— Sian, Head of Programmes
We help people living with MS to feel supported through OMS Circles, our growing global network of volunteer groups.

Our Circles are at the heart of what we do. Overcoming MS Circles are local support groups providing a supportive community and facilitated by a volunteer Ambassador.

By the end of 2020 there were 81 active Circles providing support to around 2,100 people living with MS worldwide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Circles</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
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<td>20</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa and the Middle East</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Israel (1), South Africa (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australasia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Australia (6), New Zealand (2), India (1), Taiwan (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North and South America</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>USA (10), Canada (4), Brazil (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Your Circle becomes part of your extended family. They are your confidants and friends — the ones who truly know the journey that you’re on.”
— Sean

I joined Overcoming MS as a volunteer in 2020 having had an incredible experience on a retreat. Because the charity has had a profound impact on my lifestyle and thinking around MS, I wanted to help others do the same.

As a result, I’ve met OMSers around the world, and learning from their lives and experiences has been a privilege. It is also helping me to further my understanding of issues around long-term health challenges too. It’s been lovely to get to know the OMS staff who are all really supportive, and it’s great to be part of the team driving the charity forward.”
— Hana (Volunteer Co-ordinator)

“PEOPLE POWER
Our team of 80+ volunteer Ambassadors, such as Linda in Hamburg, have benefitted from fantastic co-ordination support from our dedicated volunteers, Sarah and Hana.

I have been following the OMS program for years, and it has changed my life for the better. Volunteering for OMS gives me a sense of purpose while actually making a difference. Charities like Overcoming MS are engines of change. It is great to work alongside passionate and diverse people who share the same goal — help people with MS live well.”
— Sarah (Volunteer Co-ordinator)

I was lucky to find out about Overcoming MS a few months after my diagnosis. In 2014 all the material was only available in English and I was glad I could translate it. I also attended an Overcoming MS seminar in England and it was great to experience the hopeful spirit that was humming among the participants, volunteers and staff.

I felt really inspired to form an Overcoming MS support group in Hamburg. I really wanted to pass on the message that had helped me overcome my fears and doubts in the daunting time after my diagnosis. I was so happy to become the charity’s first German ambassador!

I wish everyone with this terrifying diagnosis would be aware of Overcoming MS and see the potential to change their lives and live the best life possible for them. The bonds that have grown between my Circle members, and the wonderful feeling you get when you help someone, are the best reward for my volunteering that I could imagine.”
— Linda (Ambassador in Hamburg, Germany)

“NEXT STEPS
Our top priority in 2021 is to provide more support and practical tools for people with MS and their families. For example, we will launch the online platform which has been custom built for Circles. This aims to help you interact together more easily and securely online.”
— Jo, Community Engagement Manager
We advocate for and with people living with MS to demonstrate how self-management and lifestyle choices are a vital part of living a full life. We influence policymakers and campaign to raise awareness of the importance and benefits of MS self-management.

To help us formulate our new strategic framework 2021–23 and 2021 business plan, we organised four community-focused Theory of Change workshops. 25 volunteers joined the staff team to help represent different types of MS, diverse backgrounds and geographies. We will continually review and refine our plan as we gather more feedback from the communities we serve.

**POLICY**

In 2020, Overcoming MS became a member of the Neurological Alliance. The Neurological Alliance is a campaigning coalition of more than 80 organisations who work together to transform outcomes for the 10 million people living in England with a neurological condition. Charities specialising in different neurological conditions help identify the common issues across healthcare provision and collectively have a stronger voice to help achieve policy change.

Overcoming MS joined the MS Academy’s “Raising the Bar in MS” Healthy Lifestyle workstream.

The MS Academy delivers innovative MS education for health and allied health professionals. It provides training for clinicians in both the clinical and managerial aspects of running an MS service.

The “MS Service Provision: Raising the Bar” initiative was set up in 2018. It brings NHS MS stakeholders together to identify and resolve barriers to care, reduce health inequalities, and share best practice. There are several different steering groups including the Healthy Lifestyle group which includes MS nurses, physiotherapists, a consultant, GP, nutritionist and neuropsychiatrist.

The aim is to ensure that everyone will have access to preventative care at the point of their MS diagnosis. The group has developed a plan to help professionals focus on health and wellness with their patients, and provide the information and support needed.

**PRESS**

One highlight of our press coverage in 2020 was 27-year old OMSer Rowan interviewed in Chat, a top ten UK women’s weekly magazine.

“I want to show that being diagnosed with MS doesn’t have to be the end. Yes, it is life-changing, but you could live well for the rest of your life.”

— Rowan

Imagine Overcoming MS four film interviewing seven people with MS in the UK was shortlisted as a finalist in the Charity Film Awards in 2020. The Charity Film Awards are produced by For Good Events, a non-profit social enterprise, set up by campaign and social media experts to showcase charity campaign films.

“I enjoyed sharing my story and being part of the film. I’m so pleased it is helping others with MS. It was viewed by over 10,000 people in the first week alone.”

— Ian

**IMAGINE**
We support and contribute to the growing body of evidence around lifestyle choices and self-management of MS to help influence and create change amongst healthcare professionals and policymakers. We work in partnerships to create genuine and sustainable benefits for people living with MS.

We have a strong partnership with the Neuroepidemiology Unit (NEU) at the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health at the University of Melbourne, Australia. The NEU was established in 2015 by Professor George Jelinek to build upon his work developing the Overcoming MS program. Principal Research Fellow Dr Sandra Neate now leads the team following Professor Jelinek’s retirement in 2019. The academics at NEU provide the evidence-base that underpins the Overcoming MS program. They can access unique preventive medicine data from large communities of people with MS. This access means they can investigate the influence of lifestyle factors upon MS and its main symptoms, and the potential for preventive medicine approaches.

We provide funding each year to ensure open access to specific academic research papers. “Open access” means free and unlimited online access for international MS researchers and healthcare professionals. It helps us increase the impact of evidence-based research into the influence lifestyle has upon MS. It encourages more international research collaborations between researchers. It can also help incorporate evidence-based research into MS healthcare management policy and practice.

In 2020 we provided £4,599 funding to ensure open access for two NEU research papers.

• £2,095 Published in the journal Informatics for Health and Social Care “Therapeutic utilisation of meditation resources by people with multiple sclerosis: Insights from an online patient discussion forum.”

• £2,479 Published in the journal Multiple Sclerosis and Related Disorders “Depression mediates the relationship between fatigue and mental health-related quality of life in multiple sclerosis.”

We also spent £31,881 providing funding for the second year to develop and pilot an online course in partnership with the NEU based on the Overcoming MS program. The Multiple Sclerosis Online Course (MSOC) will trial with 200 people with MS in 2021.

Collaborate

As part of our strategic 2021–23 plan we will collaborate with more partners globally to help improve health outcomes for people with MS. We shall also set up a Research Advisory Group of scientists and healthcare professionals to expand the evidence-base which underpins the Overcoming MS program.”

— Grazina, CEO

“...
INCOME
Our total 2020 income was £580,653. Due to the pandemic, the charity experienced a 58% drop in income compared to 2019.

FINANCIALS
We ended the year with a budget deficit of £246,919. This was partly because we wanted to ensure that our charitable services could maintain the same level of output, despite the decrease in income from the pandemic.

Expenditure
We saved on administration and overhead costs in 2020 to ensure we could continue to inform, support and empower people with MS in the most efficient way. We:

• Reduced our payroll costs through a staff recruitment freeze and restructure
• Negotiated a reduction in rent for our office and storage costs
• Received significant gift-in-kind support provided by creative agency JMAcreative in Melbourne, Australia. The value amounted to around AUD$50,000 (£26,350)
• Received pro bono HR and legal support and advice from StarLizard
• Received invaluable support from many charity volunteers who stepped forward to help and offered their time for free, using their expertise including writing blogs and video editing

Fundraising
During 2020 we raised funds through donations, grants and events. We are regulated by the Fundraising Regulator and adhere to the Fundraising Code of Practice. We did not receive any complaints about our fundraising activities in 2020.

Our total fundraising expenditure in 2020 was £73,129, as the charity began to invest in diversifying and growing its income.
We appreciate everything you do. Thank you for helping us inform, support and empower people with MS. With your help, we can help transform people’s lives together, and live well with MS.

To all our volunteers including our Trustees and Ambassadors who give their time and expertise.

To all our fundraisers who shave their heads, run a marathon or hold a cake bake sale.

To all our donors who give what they can, when they can.

THANK YOU
Get involved with Overcoming MS and learn more about how we help inform, support and empower people with MS and their communities:

- Visit overcomingms.org
- Follow us on our socials
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
  - YouTube
  - Instagram
  - @overcomingms
- Join an Overcoming MS Circle
- Listen to Living Well with MS podcast
- Subscribe to our e-newsletter
- Attend an Overcoming MS webinar
- Donate or raise funds
- Volunteer your time

INFORM, SUPPORT, EMPOWER

UK: we are a registered company limited by guarantee (No. 9044459) and a charity in England and Wales (No. 1157579), Scotland (No. SC050752) and also operate in Northern Ireland.

Australia: Registered with the ACNC. ABN 50 603 488 508.

USA: Overcoming MS is a qualified 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.