

Overcoming MS

Impact Report 2021



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I discovered Overcoming MS recently and it has been like a light going on. **

- Overcoming MS participant

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Welcome

2021 was a challenging year that truly tested the strength of spirit of our global community.

Many charities, including Overcoming MS, faced increased demand for their services whilst global healthcare systems struggled with the additional burden that the pandemic created.

Despite this challenging backdrop, I am proud that our staff and volunteers remained determined to deliver the most effective support and realistic hope to every person with MS. I want to take this opportunity to thank them for all their hard work and dedication throughout 2021.



Overcoming MS's 2021 achievements included launching **our new three-year strategy**, which firmly places the MS community at the heart of everything we do. We have increased investment into our community support services, and I think the numbers speak for themselves with increasing demand and participation.

After founding the charity almost ten years ago and serving as Chair of the Board of Trustees, after much thought, I decided it was time to hand over the baton. So, I am delighted to welcome our new Chair, Dowshan Humzah, who began the role in January 2022.

I am proud that, as an organisation, we remain resilient and more determined than ever to empower and bring hope to the MS community. As we mark our 10th anniversary year in 2022, I look forward to continuing to serve Overcoming MS in my new role as President.

2021 was a challenging year that truly tested the strength of spirit of our global community. 99

Linda BloomPresident,Overcoming MS

Alongside best clinical practice and recommended medication, lifestyle interventions such as Overcoming MS are increasingly available for other serious auto-immune and lifestyle- driven conditions, such as Type 2 diabetes and heart disease. It is time the same happens for multiple sclerosis.

Overcoming MS has a significant role in **supporting healthcare professionals** to provide practical ways for people to manage their MS better.

The beauty of Overcoming MS is that we offer simple, practical ways for people with MS to take control, working alongside their treatments and clinicians.

I want to thank Linda Bloom for her tremendous passion and energy since establishing Overcoming MS in 2012. She has been instrumental in sharing the Overcoming MS program with thousands of people with MS worldwide.

As a result, Overcoming MS has positively impacted people with MS who feel more informed and empowered to follow the Overcoming MS program. I am delighted that Linda will continue her invaluable support as the charity's President, helping us to advocate that it is possible for people with multiple sclerosis to live a full and healthy life.

As Chair of Overcoming MS, I am committed to ensuring we strive to serve better and grow our community, providing practical support, and always offering vital hope and optimism.



I believe that people with MS need Overcoming MS now more than ever.

Dowshan Humzah
 Chair of the Board of Trustees,
 Overcoming MS





About Overcoming MS

Our vision is a world where a full and healthy life with MS is possible for everyone.

Who we are

Overcoming MS is the world's leading multiple sclerosis (MS) healthy lifestyle charity.

We inform, support and empower people with MS to make practical everyday changes that can help improve their health, well-being and MS.

We achieve this through our focus on the evidence-based Overcoming MS program.

About the program

The Overcoming MS program focuses on specific everyday choices as part of a healthy lifestyle.

This includes following a plant-based whole food diet with seafood, exercise, vitamin D supplementation, medication and stress management. Our vision is for a world where a full and healthy life with MS is possible for everyone.

Thank you. I now feel much more in charge of my direction and positive about the future. "

- Overcoming MS participant



Our Aims:



Inform

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



Support

We support people living with MS with diverse needs to adopt the Overcoming MS program, wherever they are in their MS journey.



Empower

We help people with MS feel more optimistic, knowing they can take control and lead a full and healthy life.



Collaborate

We influence and partner with the broader MS community, including healthcare professionals. We aim to help them understand the importance of self-management and lifestyle choices for people with MS and the benefits of the Overcoming MS program.

overcomingms.org

Our year in numbers

Inform

Podcast 33 episodes with 100% iTunes rating 4 and 5 star 57,864 unique downloads

Book scheme

1,322

free books in the UK and Ireland















Social media 28,500 Facebook followers **2,700** on Twitter **12,600** on Instagram





2021 Impact: Inform

We ensure people affected by MS are fully informed about the evidence-based Overcoming MS program to help selfmanage multiple sclerosis.



Podcast

Our Living Well with MS podcast aims to be informative and inspiring to help people with multiple sclerosis make healthier lifestyle choices.

We are grateful for the support from The Happy Charitable Trust, who kindly provided a grant for the direct production costs.

Hosted by our **volunteer Geoff Allix** since we launched in 2019, the podcast has a growing number of listeners worldwide. In 2021 there were over **57,864** unique downloads, with an average of **1,753** unique downloads per episode.

Living Well with MS has more than **15** reviews on Apple Podcasts, with **93%** rating it **5/5**, and is ranked within the top **20%** of all podcasts by listenership.

We produced **14** full-length Living Well with MS episodes in 2021, interviewing scientists, neurologists, fitness specialists and nutritionists.

We continued to produce our popular short format podcast series called *Coffee Break*, with 14 episodes in 2021. *Coffee Break* are conversations between Geoff and other people with MS from all over the world sharing their experiences.

In 2021 we also tested five bonus episodes *Ask Jack*, with professional cook Jack McNulty answering food and cooking questions submitted by the Overcoming MS community. Jack covered various topics, from reheating food to meat substitutes and the healthiest cookware options.

As part of our commitment to inclusivity and diversity, we also began to produce transcriptions of our podcast episodes in 2021.

I always learn something new from your podcast and it helps me feel part of a movement. "

Living Well with MS podcast listener 66

Season four of Living Well with MS will include an interview with Professor George Jelinek, creator of the original Overcoming MS program. George will talk about his next book published in early 2022. ***

Geoff,Living Well with MS podcast host





You can subscribe to our podcast on all the major platforms, including iTunes.

The show notes and transcriptions can be found at: overcomingms.org/podcast



Website

In-person events continued to be on hiatus due to the ongoing pandemic in 2021. As a small international charity, through a focus on digital, we aim to have as wide a footprint and impact as economically as possible.

In 2021 we increased our efforts to ensure that content is more **diverse and inclusive** of the global MS community. Wherever possible we develop content together with volunteers including blogs, recipes, meditations, and exercise guides.

We increased our digital team's head count to three members of staff, with a new Head of Digital joining in autumn 2021. We conducted an accessibility audit and completed all suggested improvements to ensure we aligns with best practices, including:

 Our pledge that all our video content will be published with subtitles going forward. Lorna, our volunteer video editor, subtitled over 25 videos for Overcoming MS in 2021.

- All our podcast episodes since September 2021 (currently 14 episodes) are now published with a transcript. This allows the content also to be accessed by those with hearing difficulties.
- Our website now meets the standard AA Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. For example, it is now easier to navigate for users with screen readers.

Overcoming MS website users averaged over 31,000 a month during 2021. We continued to produce regular e-newsletters for almost 23,000 subscribers worldwide (19,500 in 2020), sharing news and content about living well with MS. The newsletter was redesigned during 2021 to increase the benefits for subscribers too.

The team responded to an increased number of enquiries across social media channels, email, and web comments from people wanting to learn more about the Overcoming MS program and how to adopt lifestyle changes in their daily lives. In 2021, we responded to around **400 enquiries.**

We have significant plans to improve the website experience for people interested to learn more about living well with MS. We are excited to see the benefits this will bring for users in 2022.

Vicky,Head of Digital





Sign up to our e-newsletter at overcomingms.org/newsletter and follow Overcoming MS on all major social media platforms to receive the latest news and information

facebook.com/OvercomingMS

twitter.com/OvercomingMS

(instagram.com/overcomingms)



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. Research to support it has been created by the

Neuroepidemiology Unit

(NEU) of the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne, Australia. Its evidence is broadbased and incorporates over 1,000 research studies from some of the world's leading

medical journals. We began the year with an outsourced and more cost-effective fulfillment system. In 2021, we distributed **1,322** free books in the UK and Ireland, an increase from 1,007 in 2020. We will continue to distribute the Overcoming MS book in the UK and Ireland. We will also pilot the scheme in Australia and New Zealand, made possible thanks to £14,000 funding from a generous donor. ⁹⁹

 Dr Jonathan White, Medical Advisor





1,322

free books were distributed in the UK and Ireland, an increase from 2020.



Webinar



Our presenters bring a wealth of knowledge and sessions are developed using community feedback. We will run another Ask Aaron session with neurologist Dr Aaron Boster in 2022 because it proved to be so popular. **

Liz,Community EngagementProgramme Manager

Pre-pandemic, Overcoming MS focused upon providing popular events sharing information and support.

This included our annual UK conference, a series of one-day workshops and week-long residential retreats. International retreat locations ranged according to need, resource, and demand.

2021 continued to be a challenging year to organise in-person events and we responded by launching our second webinar series, Finding Hope with Overcoming MS, in June 2021.

In total, we produced 6.5 hours of webinar content and had 2,451 replays. We also answered 258 questions from people keen to understand more about making healthier choices with Overcoming MS. The series achieved an average of 94% satisfaction, rating the quality of information as high or very high.

Last night's webinar was amazing, and it really gave me a sense of community. **

Overcoming MSWebinar Participant



You can rewatch all previous webinars and view materials by visiting overcomingms.org/webinars

We developed the webinars with community input and held six live sessions with expert speakers and Q&As.

1.

Overview

Dr Jonathan White is an NHS Obstetrician and Gynaecologist based in Northern Ireland. Jonathan was diagnosed with relapsing-remitting MS (RRMS) in 2015 and works for Overcoming MS as our medical adviser. He hosted a Q&A on MS and Overcoming MS and covered tips on getting started with the Overcoming MS program.

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Progressive MS

Phil Startin was diagnosed with primary progressive MS (PPMS) in 2007. After a successful career as a management consultant, Phil now teaches mindfulnessbased stress reduction courses. Professor Helen Rees Leahy was diagnosed with PPMS in 1997. A Professor Emerita in art history, Helen continues to research and teach doctoral students. Phil and Helen have both followed the Overcoming MS program for many years and discussed its benefits in relation to progressive MS.

3.

Movement

Gillan Robinson is the lead physiotherapist at the MS Therapy Centre in Lothian, Scotland. She is also an experienced acupuncture practitioner. Gillan discussed why movement, exercise and breathing are important for people with MS.

4. Woman's health

Women are two to three times more likely than men to be diagnosed with MS, potentially due to genetic factors and hormones.

Dr Jonathan White and Professor Helen Rees Leahy discussed how women's experiences of living with MS are different from men's: from pregnancy, breastfeeding and menopause to broader questions about medical attitudes about women's experience of illness and pain. **5**.

Overcoming MS Diet

This webinar focussed on the Overcoming MS dietary recommendations with chefs Gillian Robertson and Ashley Madden. Gillian and Ashley talked about practicalities including budget-friendly options and meal planning.

Gillian, a private chef living in Switzerland, was diagnosed with RRMS in 2017. Ashley is a pharmacist turned plant-based chef and certified holistic nutrition consultant. Ashley has followed the Overcoming MS program since being diagnosed

with MS in her early 20s.

6.

Neurologist Q&A

US neurologist Dr Aaron Boster, answered the community's questions about living well with MS. Dr Boster has been a principal investigator in numerous clinical trials, trains doctors and nurse practitioners and has published extensively in medical journals. 3,006 people registered and 978 attended our live sessions across 36 countries. In 2020, 434 attended from

attended from 55 countries.

overcomingms.org





Support

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

Overcoming MS Circles are local community support groups facilitated by a volunteer Ambassador. Our Circles can offer a lifeline to people with MS, providing support on selfmanagement for people who have embarked on the Overcoming MS program.

Pre-pandemic, Ambassadors organised physical meetups in their local area. People living with MS (either newly diagnosed or living with MS for some time, as well as their partners and families) would come together for advice, information, and support.

Support continued to operate largely online, due to ongoing social restrictions caused by the pandemic.

By the end of 2021 there were **94 active Circles** providing support to 1,964 people living with MS across 29 countries. Over the year we welcomed 37 new volunteer Ambassadors, bringing our total to 100.

66 Overcoming MS has been crucial for people with MS in our area, including the local Circle which I highly recommend to my patients. The variety of support offered ensures there is something for everyone. ""

- Overcoming MS Circles member



Circles Global Impact

United Kingdom

England (22), Scotland (3), Northern Ireland (2), Wales (1)

Europe

Germany (10), Netherlands (3), Italy (2), Belgium (2), Spain (2), Czech Republic,



South America

USA (12), Canada (4), Brazil (1), Columbia (1)

the Middle East

Israel (1), South Africa (1), Nigeria (1)

Australia and Asia

Australia (8), New Zealand (5), India (1), Taiwan (1)

Thematic Circle

Living Well with Progressive MS and Global Circle



Circles Online

We launched our new digital platform, Circles Online, to facilitate secure online community engagement, supported by a grant from The Rank Foundation.

Overcoming MS Circles Online aims to enhance our existing volunteer outreach by facilitating online peer support for people with MS within a safe and secure digital platform. Previously, Ambassadors had been providing online support using Google Groups and WhatsApp.

We felt it was important to develop and offer this platform rather than continue to rely on third-party services. There was a need to **provide a more private and secure online network** following data security breaches with Google Groups.

Circles Online is also a more inclusive platform for people without a social media presence and is free from advertising.

Some people wish to keep their diagnosis private, so this gives them the opportunity for greater control over their anonymity. We ran dedicated webinars for Ambassadors to demonstrate how to use the new platform. By the end of 2021, 100 Ambassadors and 41% of Circle members had registered in the 111 online Circle groups. We also:

 Established three Peer Support Groups.
 These are inclusive groups for Ambassadors to feel more supported in their role in a solutionsbased peer forum.

 Conducted an Ambassador Engagement survey. This helped us to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse needs and priority areas for support within our Circles community. Thank you to everyone who provided feedback or participated in our survey. Our aim in 2022 is to ensure our Ambassadors feel more informed, supported and empowered.

We hope to continue building capacity to support the Overcoming MS community, both online and offline. ""

Jake,
 Community Engagement Administrator









Empower

Community engagement

Our first global community engagement survey had a high participation rate, with **1,367 people** answering a detailed online questionnaire.

The survey confirmed that we play a significant role in empowering people to take control of their MS, leading to a tangible impact on their quality of life:

- 68% of respondents feel very empowered or empowered by Overcoming MS
- 58% strongly agree or agree that the quality of their life has improved
- 78% would be very likely or likely to recommend
 Overcoming MS to their friends and family

While these results are positive, there is plenty to focus on in 2022. We will repeat the survey regularly to inform our plans and activities. 66

Overcoming MS was the missing piece of the jigsaw I've been searching for. Thank you for empowering me to enable me to empower others. ***

Overcoming MS community member

Policy

As part of our strategic review in 2020, Overcoming MS identified the need to increase our influencing activity with policymakers to champion the importance of lifestyle interventions in MS clinical practice.

In 2021, we began scoping our campaigning potential and plans. We also began to build relationships with healthcare professionals worldwide, including neurologists and MS nurses. This included presenting to healthcare professionals, including East Sussex NHS Trust in England.

We also continued to work in partnership with **MS Academy**, which provides innovative MS education for health and allied health professionals.

We participated in a new piece of collaborative research together called The Wellbeing Gap - No One Size MS Service Fits All. Our research compared four NHS England Integrated Care Systems to determine the wellbeing gaps for patients living with MS in England.

We reviewed data from Cheshire and Merseyside, Devon, Surrey, and Sussex, with a combined population of 6.7 million people.

We analysed factors including socioeconomic status and deprivation, co-morbidities, and emergency admissions. The research was presented at the European Committee for Treatment & Research in Multiple Sclerosis (ECTRIMS) event in October 2021.

Overcoming MS is also a member of the **Neurological Alliance**, a campaigning coalition of more than 80 organisations working together to improve the quality of care for people living with a neurological condition in England.

exercises run by the Alliance to **contribute to policy development designed to improve neurological services.** Caroline Clarke, Overcoming MS Trustee, also delivered a keynote speech at the Alliance's Annual

General Meeting.

We participated in consultation

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Thank you to everyone who took the time to participate in our first major survey. We now have a better understanding of the Overcoming MS community.

Going forward, we know which areas we need to develop, and crucially, we have baselines for measuring our impact. >>

Sian,Head of Programmes



Collaborate

We influence and partner with the broader MS community, including healthcare professionals.

Our aim is to help them understand the importance of self-management and lifestyle choices for people with MS and the benefits of the Overcoming MS program.



Learning Partnership

Overcoming MS successfully applied for a place (subsidised by the National Lottery Community Fund) on an intensive 16-week course with Spring Impact, a global leader in social replication.

Scale Accelerator: Leaders of Scale is a leadership development programme, equipping the charity with the necessary skills and knowledge to grow the reach and impact of our work.

This included designing a pilot programme that reimagines Overcoming MS residential retreats in a post pandemic world.

Our aim is to combine digital education and community in-person events to provide an immersive and inclusive experience for anyone living with MS who would like to begin to adopt the Overcoming MS program in their daily life.

Having completed the **Leaders of Scale programme** over 2021, we intend to start smallscale pilots subject to funding and the delivery of
the MS Online Course with the University of
Melbourne.

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We must empower our patients with knowledge and skills, so they are equal partners in their healthcare.

Thousands worldwide have used Overcoming MS for information and support for years. Shouldn't we as healthcare professionals be aware of what Overcoming MS has got to offer? ⁹⁹

- Overcoming MS healthcare professional



The University of Melbourne

Our longstanding partnership continued with the Neuroepidemiology Unit (NEU) at the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health at the University of Melbourne.

We provided £6,962 to fund open access for **three NEU** academic research papers.

This ensures unlimited free access to the latest research into MS and lifestyle for international MS researchers and healthcare professionals.

Our support can encourage more international research collaborations in the short term. Longer term, access will help lifestyle management to be incorporated as an important part of healthcare management policy and practice.

- £2,475 Published in the journal Quality of Life Research, "Greater mastery is associated with lower depression risk in a large international cohort of people with multiple sclerosis over 2.5 years."
- £2,278 Published in the journal Multiple Sclerosis and Related Disorders, "Sociodemographic and clinical characteristics of diet adherence and relationship with diet quality in an international cohort of people with multiple sclerosis."

• £2,207 Published in the journal Health Expectations, "Experiences of and attitudes to lifestyle modification for management of multiple sclerosis: a qualitative analysis of free text survey data."

Following funding from the charity in 2019 and 2020, the NEU developed and piloted an online course based on the Overcoming MS program.

The Multiple Sclerosis Online Course (MSOC) is currently in trials led by the academic research team in Australia.

HelloSelf

HelloSelf is the UK's largest independent online therapy clinic with over 80 mental health professionals.

Together in 2021 we piloted a partnership project and provided eight remote therapy sessions to ten people with MS in the UK.

We wanted to better understand how therapy can support wellness in those living with MS. Of the eight participants who took part in the evaluation, all experienced improvement in at least one area (anxiety, depression, overall wellbeing).

The most common theme discussed by participants was the impact of MS on their family and relationships.

Following our evaluation,
Overcoming MS and HelloSelf
are continuing in 2022 to **trial a psychological support project** for families of people
with MS. We are also creating a
new project together to increase
support for Overcoming MS
Ambassadors.

I have multiple sclerosis and have been following the Overcoming MS program for several years.

As a Clinical Psychologist I have been surprised by the lack of psychological support on offer for people with MS. So many people with MS are left to grapple with the psychological impact alone. It is important that we are viewed and supported as a whole person - not just as a brain with lesions. Engaging in therapy can support people who are living with chronic health conditions such as MS.

Dr Nicky Hartigan,Clinical Director, HelloSelf



More new partnerships

We expanded our partnerships in 2021, including presentations with TalkHealth and the Metropolitan Police in London.

TalkHealth is one of the UK's leading online health communities.

They invited Dr Jonathan
White to speak about the
benefits of the Overcoming
MS program from his personal
and professional perspective.

Sam Josephs, professional Nutritional Therapist and Overcoming MS facilitator spoke at a staff conference for the Metropolitan Police in London, UK, focussing upon the importance of healthy nutrition for people with MS. We also improved the movement and exercise resources on our website. We worked with a focus group of Overcoming MSers reflecting on their daily exercise and movement challenges. We achieved these improvements through partnerships with **Dr Gretchen Hawley** and **Taming the Walrus.**

 Dr Gretchen Hawley is a Doctor of Physical Therapy and a Multiple Sclerosis Certified Specialist. After graduating from Simmons University in Boston, she developed a Multiple Sclerosis programme alongside two of the city's top MS neurologists. Dr Hawley uses the concept of neuroplasticity to improve strength, balance and walking by using specific, functional exercises. Dr Hawley has also developed a virtual physical therapy programme to help people improve their MS symptoms.

 Taming the Walrus is a yoga company for people with long-term chronic health conditions led by Véronique Gauthier-Simmons.



Partnerships will continue to grow

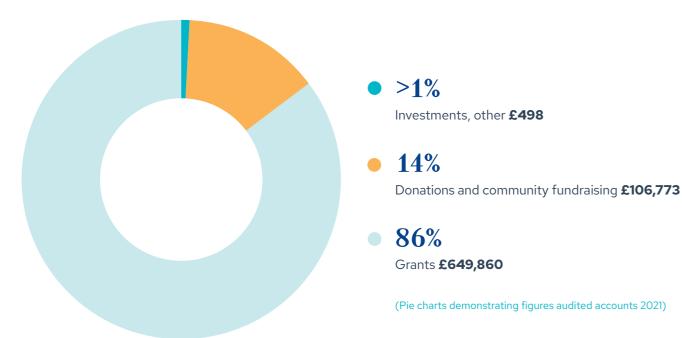
in importance for Overcoming MS.
We have made a great start, improved practical resources and tried new things. When we work together, we are stronger. **

Eve,Head of Fundraising



How your funds are spent

Income



Our total 2021 income was £756,633 raised through donations, community fundraising, and grants. In 2020 our total income was £580,653.

We are encouraged by our 2021 results, following the 58% decrease we experienced in 2020 due to the pandemic. As a small charity we will continue to work hard with our funders and supporters to continue to recover and grow.

We are grateful to receive core funding from The Bloom Foundation. We also would like to thank The Rank Foundation, Lloyd's Market Charity Awards, and The Happy Charitable Trust, for their support in 2021.

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 2021.

Our total fundraising expenditure in 2021 was £72,607 as we began the first year of our new three-year fundraising strategy, to diversify and grow income.



You can download a full copy of our audited 2021 accounts and Trustee annual report at:

overcomingms.org/about-us/overcoming-ms-governance

Expenditure

Our total expenditure was £794,171.

Whilst we are making the necessary investment in improving our operational infrastructure, we continued to **make savings on our overhead costs in 2021.** We;

- Received significant gift-in-kind design and brand support provided by agency JMA Creative in Melbourne, Australia. The value amounted to at least £50,000.
- Received pro bono HR and legal support from StarLizard with an estimated value of £10,000.
- Were supported by many volunteers who wrote blogs, edited videos and provided expertise.
- Updated our IT to improve remote team working
- Decided to close our permanent physical office in England to create an estimated annual saving of £13,000. This will come into effect in mid-2022.



9%

Fundraising and publicity £72,607

27%

Overhead **£218,279**

53%

Charitable activities £424,678

Reserves

Our aim is to maintain sufficient funds in our unrestricted reserves to cover six month's overhead expenditure (around £320,000). At the end of 2021, we held £476,457 in total reserves including £310,723 in unrestricted reserves.

We have set aside £151,993 in designated reserves to cover anticipated costs of projects in 2022. We closed 2021 with £13,741 in restricted reserves. This is income **gifted by generous donors to be spent on specific projects and regions.**



What we plan next

Over 2022 and beyond, we plan to:



Inform

Grow our profile with healthcare professionals and reach more people newly diagnosed with MS



Support

Widen support to encompass the whole family unit affected by MS



Empower

Invest in our staff and volunteers to better serve our community and deliver our vision



Collaborate

Explore new partnerships supporting mental and physical health



Thank you

To all of our:

Volunteers

including our Trustees and Ambassadors who give their time and expertise.

Fundraisers

who attend virtual quizzes, and run, walk or wheel.

Donors

who give what they can, when they can.

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Thank you for helping to inform, support and empower people with MS.

With your help, we can empower more people to live well with MS.



Overcoming MS

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