

**MentalHealth**<sup>•</sup>  
ResearchUK

# Celebrating 10 years of raising funds for research into mental illness

2008-2018





To celebrate our tenth anniversary, we are reflecting on what our scholars have achieved, the progress we have made to improve mental health research, and our vision for the next ten years.

Mental Health Research UK was founded in 2008. We are the only organisation in the country that exclusively supports UK-based research into mental health. We invest in some of the most promising young British scientists in research environments that are at the forefront of the fight to find ways of preventing and treating mental illness.

Despite increasing levels of awareness and efforts to de-stigmatise mental illness, it remains chronically underfunded. Mental health research receives 25 times less funding per person affected than physical conditions such as cancer, according to a new report from MQ.<sup>1</sup> We are determined to change this.

Our charity is run entirely by trustees and volunteers who do so because we passionately believe that building a better knowledge base and understanding around mental health and mental illness is essential for improving outcomes – changing lives, making a long-term difference.

This includes developing a thriving academic community that relies on the talent of people from a range of disciplines, including bio-medical sciences, social science, law and ethics, computer science and humanities.

We also drive public involvement in mental health research, involving people with direct experience of mental health issues in our commissioning of research. We are ambitious and want to achieve more for people living with mental illness.

We are proud to have pledged that no less than 95% of our donations go directly into research. We have no permanent employees and rely on the generosity of our trustees and volunteers working with us without remuneration. So, by supporting Mental Health Research UK, your money is going directly to our research students.

1. MQ Report: UK Mental Health Research Funding 2014–2017

# How we fund research students

We are a small charity with limited resources. We needed to decide how we would fund mental health research, to complement the resources of other funders. The Trustees made the decision to focus on funding PhD scholarships, which cost between £80k and £100k each. We took the decision to make our awards a four-year commitment, knowing how hard it can be to complete writing up within three years, and how the completion of the thesis can be delayed.

By investing in individual PhD scholarships, we are helping to build research capacity and interest in mental health research across the UK. We know it is not easy to get funding for the first step onto the academic ladder, and equally not easy to gain experience as a PhD supervisor to progress a career in mental health research. So, we decided to help fill that funding gap.

We were also concerned with the poor level of support afforded to psychiatrists to pursue research careers. We have thus recently started to support a programme of work at King's College London, supporting psychiatrists over 4-5 years to complete a Masters in Research (MD(Res)).

We began with just one scholarship in each of the first two years, the first funded jointly with the University of Nottingham. In 2013 we linked with the Schizophrenia Research Fund which has increased our financial stability and, with increased success in attracting funds, the scholarship programme has now expanded to three or four new awards per year.

**The figures below show some key facts about our scholarship programme over the first ten years of the charity.**

## MentalHealth ResearchUK Celebrating 10 years of raising funds for research into mental illness 2008-2018

### We have raised over £1 million:

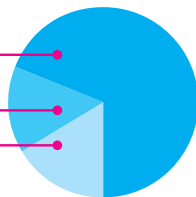
**Donations = £752,276**

(such as sponsored events like marathons)

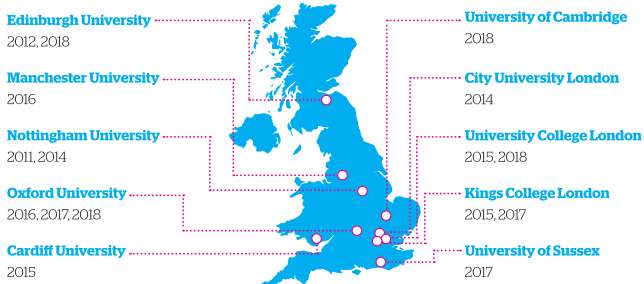
**Charitable Trusts = £158,115**

**Grants and Investments = £177,928**

95% of all the money raised by MHRUK goes on research.



### We have invested in 16 PhD Scholarships across the UK at ten different locations at a cost of £1.32 million.



### The research areas covered by our PhDs are:

- 9** Schizophrenia
- 2** Depression
- 3** Children and Young People's Mental Health
- 1** Anxiety Disorder
- 1** Bipolar Disorder

**900 hours** donated by **volunteer administration** each year.



### We have over

**3,000**

**Twitter followers,**  
**and over 1,000**  
**newsletter supporters**



**We launched the Tom Palmer Award in 2017, and have one psychiatrist supported through their research studies.**

### We are entirely volunteer-led

A total of **11 Trustees** have given time. We have no staff. We have worked with **11 volunteers** over the past 10 years **which means we've kept our overheads to less than 5%.**



**“ Having funding from a charity has definitely made a difference to the way I have approached my studies. Knowing that Mental Health Research UK has chosen to invest in this research topic on the basis of a belief that it is a worthwhile project continues to feed into my motivation to produce the best work possible and commit myself even more to the PhD. ”**

PhD student

**“ I just wanted to say a big thank you - your support has been instrumental for us to advance innovation and research. ”**

PhD supervisor

**We have distributed 500 mental health awareness badges through our Blooming Monday campaign, which has been running on the third Monday of January since 2013.**



### We work in partnership with others:

- Alliance of Mental Health Research Funders 2008-2018
- Department of Health Mental Health Research Framework Steering Group 2016-2018
- Funding partner for the Priority Setting Partnership - children and young people's mental health research 2016-2018
- Funding partner for Science Media Centre since 2016



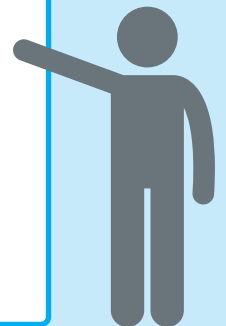
**Thank you for all your support.**

Mental Health Research UK is a registered charity - England No. 1125538

# A word from our Trustees

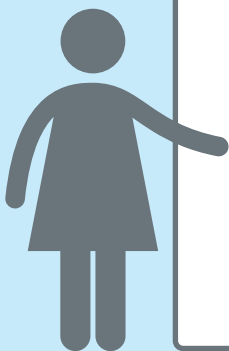
**“ I have only recently joined MHRUK as a trustee and am hugely impressed by the quality of the scholars, their supervisors and the science they are doing. Our funding reaches across the UK and across a range of scientific disciplines, and is vitally important to a field that is starved of research funding. ”**

Prof Sir Michael Owen, Division of Psychological Medicine and Clinical Neuroscience, Cardiff University



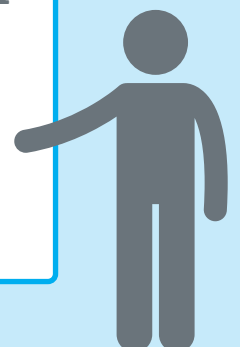
**“ I am very proud of what we have achieved over the past ten years from very small beginnings. Building capacity now is key to expanding mental health research in the future and Mental Health Research UK will continue to do this. We will also identify gaps in funding particularly with regard to the promotion of research careers among psychiatrists. ”**

Professor Clair Chilvers, cofounder and chair



**“ As a Trustee of the Schizophrenia Research Fund, we were delighted to link with Mental Health Research UK to add additional resource to its clear strategic direction. ”**

Lord Neuberger, former President of the Supreme Court, Trustee





# We are making a difference

Looking back on the past 10 years, we began to reflect on what our fundraising efforts had achieved. We decided a good place to start would be to ask the students who had been supported on Mental Health Research UK studentships for their feedback, and that of their university supervisors. We summarise what they told us here.

“ We know that funding for PhD studentships is available from many different sources but is still in short supply for mental health research. ”

Dr Louise Johns, PhD supervisor,  
University of Oxford

Our funding is enabling ground-breaking research building on new developments in scientific knowledge and digital technology. Importantly, our scholars want their work to help others and not only to progress their own education. We are supporting work to speed up the process of obtaining a diagnosis and developing new psychological treatments. Our scholars want to generate hope, through research findings, that people in the future will experience less distress as mental health treatment and support will be much improved. Doctoral research studies can also provide a steppingstone for researchers to build upon in larger programmes of research.

“ I felt there was a lot of catching up to do in understanding the biology behind psychiatric disorders. Modern lab-based techniques can now model these illnesses quite well and there’s growing evidence for genetic and environmental associations with psychiatric disorders, derived from large population-based datasets. I felt like it was an exciting time to be part of research in mental health as these technologies are ramping up the rate of new discoveries in the field. ”

Dr Daniel McCartney, former PhD Scholar

“ There is very little research out there when it comes to understanding the genetic aetiology of bipolar disorder. At present, I am focussing on childhood/ adolescence as this area has not been explored in the literature and am hoping that any contribution I can make will help. ”



Sumit Mistry

“ I chose to do research into mental health treatments because it is clearly an area of increasing importance where there is much further work to be done. I wanted to do this more than I wanted to become a clinical psychologist because while some current treatments are good, it’s exciting to be part of helping to create better ones. ”



Poppy Brown

We are helping people develop careers in mental health research, including drawing on personal experiences of mental health issues and knowledge gained through PhD studies. One supervisor emphasised how important individual PhD studentship awards were as larger funders are keen to award centre grants, clustering PhD awards, and this can reduce investment available for smaller research teams.

“ This sounds obvious, but mental health is an incredibly complex area to understand! There’s no one answer for everything, and it has been really interesting to consider the psychological, medical, sociological, and financial (to name a few) perspectives relating to mental health. I have also learnt that everyone has been through different experiences and situations, and that these are all valuable. The overall experience has been great in informing my current role as Research Fellow within our research group. ”



Dr Bethan Davis,  
former PhD Scholar

“ I chose to do a PhD in mental health because when I was 24, I was diagnosed with depression and one year later with bipolar disorder. I therefore have a vested interest in helping to progress understanding. ”



Sumit Mistry

We are keen to develop research methodology, including randomised controlled trial procedures and how we involve people with mental health problems more in our work. Methodological development are ambitions some of our scholars also share.

“ I particularly want a career in mental health research both because I find it interesting and also because I want to help those whose lives are affected by mental health difficulties. I want to do research that keeps the population it’s researching at the centre of its investigation. ”



Jessica Radley

Another important contribution from Mental Health Research UK scholars is sharing what is currently known about a topic area, collating current evidence and building on it. There is a strong sense that we have a lot to learn and must make use of existing research as well as generate new questions to answer.

“ I was working in public mental health, and found it frustrating that for many important issues, we either did not have adequate evidence to make decisions, or practitioners were not being connected with the research that was being generated. I knew I loved research and was passionate about mental health, so saw doing a PhD as an opportunity to try to answer some of the big questions that remain about mental health and to be able to communicate clearly about the existing evidence. ”



Dr Jen Dykxhoorn,  
former PhD Scholar



Each year, we organise an annual Scholars’ Day, bringing together students and their supervisors from around the country. This provides a year on year chart of progress being made. We are proud of the research being pursued on diverse topics including understanding how treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder work in practice, exploring how school experiences impact on later mental health and wellbeing, and understanding the neurobiological mechanisms of clozapine-induced Obsessive Compulsive Symptoms in schizophrenia and its treatment.

# Building a new research workforce

One of the reasons why we invest in PhD scholarships is to build a new research workforce in the academic system and foster the next generation of mental health researchers. It has been really heartening to learn that all our early scholars have stayed in mental health research, or plan to do so. One scholar is now supervising the next generation of PhD students, passing on skills and enthusiasm gained while supported by Mental Health Research UK. Supervisors also recognised how Mental Health Research UK funding was supporting their careers, including a recent promotion, through achieving grant funding success as well as gaining new skills as supervisors.

**“ I think being able to create a career in something I feel is meaningful and important is the biggest reward. I am excited to continue my career in research, as it is a life of asking questions, learning, and striving to improve, and that is the recipe for a fulfilling and exciting career. ”**



Dr Jen Dykxhoorn,  
former PhD Scholar

**“ I hope that the PhD will lead me to a role in teaching, to pass on knowledge to help inspire future generations to study mental health... Personally, I have always wanted a career where I feel I am contributing to something worthwhile and which can help people. Although research isn't something the public, service users and carers often see or are aware of, it is highly rewarding to know that the work done behind the scenes can positively influence public care services over time. ”**



Heather McDonald

The scholarships also have an impact on academic staff.

**“ The scholarship also counts as grant income, which is an important indicator of career progress for academics. ”**

Dr Stella Chan, PhD supervisor  
University of Edinburgh

**“ This is my first PhD student for whom I am primary supervisor, and I am excited to work with the student to conduct the research. ”**

Dr Louise Johns, PhD supervisor  
University of Oxford

Research does not change lives or mental health services overnight, and our scholars are realistic about the impact their studies can have in the short term. Yet this does not dampen their ambition. Together, they are determined to change the future of mental health treatment and outcomes. They actively advocate mental health research careers, motivating other young people to do a PhD. We're proud that our research students are helping to build a pipeline of future talent, nurturing the next generation of mental health research students.

**“ I think the fact that I'm doing a PhD in such an exciting and important area at the age of just 21 has actually really helped other young people realise that, if there's something they really care about, then a PhD might be the perfect option for them – PhDs can be fun, rewarding, and your work can really make a difference, however old you are. ”**



Poppy Brown

# We are creating mental health advocates of the future

Doing a PhD in mental health educates students on wider issues around mental health including stigma, economic costs for individuals, families and society, the distress and pain experienced as well as positive personal stories, lack of investment in mental health care and the complexity of understanding mental health. Some of our scholars felt a strong personal connection to the issue and have developed new awareness and skills to help others in distress.

“ On a personal level I have so much more empathy for individuals who may be going through daily mental health struggles. ”

Former Scholar

We know our scholars are grateful for our supporters' donations and support. Quite literally, they couldn't do it without you. Knowing that your individual contributions (be that baking cakes or climbing a mountain!) are directly funding their studies is incredibly motivating. They feel accountable to the charity, working extra hard to achieve both the delivery of a project but also useful new knowledge.

“ I wanted to ensure they had made the right decision through working hard to achieve a PhD. ”



Dr Bethan Davis,  
former PhD Scholar

“ It helps me remain motivated and inspired. ”



Poppy Brown

We know that doing a PhD can be personally isolating as well as hard work. We were pleased to learn that our funding provided added assurance of the relevance of the work.

“ Knowing that Mental Health Research UK has chosen to invest in this research topic on the basis of a belief that it is a worthwhile project continues to feed into my motivation to produce the best work possible and commit myself even more to the PhD. It gives me an extra sense of meaning and worth to the project; knowing that my work is supported by a mental health charity reassures me of the relevance and importance of the theme of the project and even gives me an extra boost of confidence when presenting my work. ”



Heather McDonald

We heard how receiving funding from a charity also has added benefits, with a mention made of the networking opportunities we try to encourage and a clear connection between research and real-life concerns affecting people with mental health problems. The fellowship that people experience from the charity on their PhD journey was particularly valued.

“ The annual scholars' day and the connection to individuals connected to the charity has reinforced the need for this work we do and has grounded the research in pragmatic concerns. I think that is the real benefit of receiving funding from a charity as opposed to a broad funding body. ”



Dr Jen Dykxhoorn,  
former PhD Scholar





# The challenges of a research career

We asked what people found challenging about working in mental health research because we are keen to strive to improve the whole research ecosystem. We heard how despite being committed to science, an academic career within the university setting is difficult because of the scarcity of permanent positions and difficulties gaining funding, particularly in mental health research.

“ Although there are a lot of benefits in working with a university, job security is not one of them. ”

Dr Daniel McCartney, former PhD Scholar

This relates to ability to plan for the future including, how moving from institution to institution seems to be the ‘norm’. Combining a research career and clinical practice such as clinical psychology was described as ‘difficult’ and ‘challenging’.

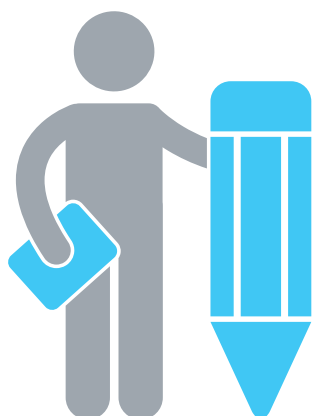
We also heard how grant-bid development was both time consuming and also created uncertainty and workplace stress, because even if successful, funding was often short-term. Our scholars recommended that Mental Health Research UK work in collaboration with other charities, and work to influence government policy to develop greater job security within academia.

A further recognised challenge was how to translate research findings into practice. Our scholars explained how hard it was to build up ‘strong enough’ evidence to support the implementation of new treatments. The lack of funds for services and research was acknowledged.

“ Mental health research still isn’t seen as important as physical health research and it receives much less grant funding for research and NHS funding for treatment and training. ”



Jessica Radley





# Recommendations for Mental Health Research UK

Our research students are at the centre of everything we do. We value their ideas for how we can grow and improve over the years to come.

We asked for feedback on what Mental Health Research UK could do differently. Several suggestions were put forward. The scholars recommended that the studentship include additional funding for training, research costs including laboratory fees, conference attendance and resources to enhance their studies. The trustees have responded positively to each suggestion.

As a result of this feedback from our scholars, we're planning to organise more events, bringing people together, sharing research and collaborating. We are also keen to involve and engage our supporters in research policy debates and campaign activities.

We are a member of two mental health research funder groups and seek to progress policy and campaign work in partnership with other charities and organisations.

Another idea we're exploring is to develop a peer-to-peer network so scholars can support each other with their studies. Those who gain their PhDs might be able to mentor new students. It was also suggested that trustees could mentor scholars, passing on their expertise and enthusiasm for mental health research.

The training of PhD students is crucial and it was suggested Mental Health Research UK talk to other funders and gain agreement for Mental Health Research UK scholars to be able to join Medical Research Council and Economic and Social Research Council doctoral fellowship programmes within the same host institution, if they are available.

The final recommendation to Mental Health Research UK was to continue funding and supporting PhD scholarships, an unsurprising recommendation from students and their supervisors but based upon a sense that there is a huge need for more work in this area. We agree and thank all our supporters for helping us do the work we do.

“ Mental health research encompasses an array of questions – from finding out the causes and contributors of mental ill health, what interventions help facilitate change and treatment of mental health issues, and then looking at recovery and what that means. Within each area, a number of approaches are used to explore the issue – such as medical sociology, psychiatry, psychology, and power. It is a very complex area and there are unlimited questions to be explored in mental health research. ”



Dr Bethan Davis,  
former PhD Scholar

# We can't do it alone



Over the past decade, we've developed a strong programme and we are already making an impact.

To achieve our vision for the next 10 years, we need your help.

Could you help with:

- Fundraising
- Volunteering / becoming a trustee?

Our scholars are very aware of the commitment of others to help them progress in their career.

Your support is greatly appreciated.

“ I was definitely more aware of the fact that my funding came from the generosity of other individuals. ”

Dr Daniel McCartney, former PhD Scholar

# MentalHealth<sup>••</sup> ResearchUK

For further information, or to pledge support, please contact us by sending an email to [trustees@mhruk.org](mailto:trustees@mhruk.org)

Mental Health Research UK is the first UK charity dedicated to raising funds for research into mental illness, their causes and cures.

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