2020

MARCH Network
Year in Review

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MARCH Network | 2020 in Review
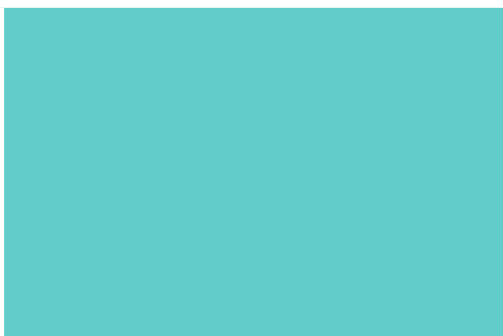
1657 Members

225 Early career researchers

730 Active Basecamp members

150k Website hits

3406 twitter followers

22 Newsletters

360 Policy updates and opportunities shared

36 Published research papers

600 "Mechanisms of action" identified linking leisure to mental health

171k Participants in MARCH research

12 Special Interest Research Groups

£280k Invested in 15 research projects

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE...

The MARCH Network is two years old!

Over the past 24 months, MARCH has worked with researchers, community organisations, policy groups, mental health charities and people with lived experience across the UK to help transform our understanding of the role of social, cultural and community assets in mental health.

Here's a closer look at our top 10 achievements since our inception:

1. The MARCH network has far exceeded its anticipated reach. **Membership** has grown to over 1,600 members, with over 3,400 people now following us on Twitter. Our website has received over 150,000 visits in the past year.
2. MARCH has shared 22 **newsletters** involving 108 spotlights on practice, over 180 policy updates, over 90 funding opportunities, and over 90 new research papers. 734 members have taken part in our online Basecamp discussion forum and we coordinate 12 Special Interest Groups involving 859 members.
3. We have worked with over 300 members of the network to co-produce a new **Research Agenda** (published in the British Journal of Psychiatry Open) that has identified the most pressing research gaps in the field.
4. Guided by the agenda, we have distributed £280,000 in **Plus Funds**, funding 8 Sandpit events that were attended by over 150 people and 7 new research grants that are currently underway.
5. We have worked with the MARCH Disciplinary Expert Group to identify over 600 **"mechanisms of action"** that link leisure engagement to mental and physical health. The mechanisms have been synthesised into a new framework using the lens of complexity science due to be published shortly in The Lancet Psychiatry.

6. We have published an **evidence synthesis report** with the World Health Organisation bringing together the findings from over 3,000 studies on arts and health that was named the Global Aesthetic Achievement of 2019. We have also produced follow-on policy briefings for the World Health Organization and the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport and spoken about our work to the UN, UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments), OECD (Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development) and several All-Party Parliamentary Groups.

7. We have been working to map the **barriers and motivators** to social, cultural and community engagement and have run focus groups and interviews with network members including individuals with lived experience of mental illness, GPs involved in social prescribing, and community organisations. We've also analysed data from national datasets and published our findings in six scientific papers.

8. We have worked closely with the BBC's annual **'Get Creative' Festival**, supporting the communication of research to the public. As part of this, we ran two major BBC Citizen Science experiments involving over 98,000 people, with the data now publicly available for analysis.

9. We have worked to support the **national roll-out of social prescribing**. We have hosted a sold-out policy conference 'Arts on Prescription', collaborated with NHS England to undertake analyses of NHS data from London looking at the reach and impact of the roll-out, written a policy briefing on social prescribing for DCMS, and presented at a number of social prescribing conferences and policy days.

10. Through our **ECR steering group**, we have worked with 65 ECRs to deliver blogs, social media activity, and podcasts. We have run two week-long intensive ECR training events on arts and health research in the UK and US for over 80 ECRs, led two day-long research blitz events for community organisations, and supported the Arts Health Early Career Research Network (a network of over 1100 ECRs).

I thoroughly enjoyed the breadth of my engagement with MARCH, be it as a speaker, focus group participant or interested party to the great work being developed across the community. As a passionate advocate for social prescribing, I particularly like the combination of great detail in the evidence presented by Daisy and colleagues, while being mindful of the need to involve everyone in the understanding, regardless of their background, and consistently remembering that this is about people and their wellbeing. I am continuing my support of social prescribing in Public Health England and look forward to working with MARCH colleagues and others across this important social movement.
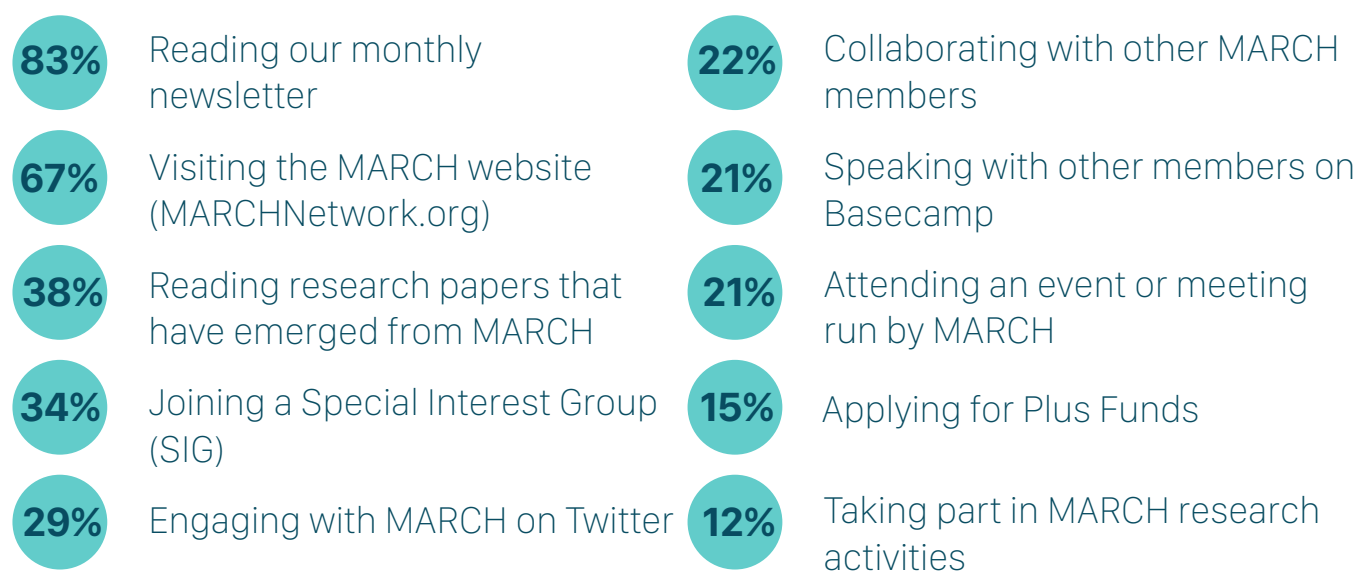
Craig Lister
Health and Wellbeing
Programme Lead
Public Health England
- East of England

OUR MEMBER'S VIEWS

We undertook a second evaluation open to all network members. Over 130 people participated and here is what they said:

What are the top 10 ways members are engaging with the network?

83% Reading our monthly newsletter

67% Visiting the MARCH website (MARCHNetwork.org)

38% Reading research papers that have emerged from MARCH

34% Joining a Special Interest Group (SIG)

29% Engaging with MARCH on Twitter

22% Collaborating with other MARCH members

21% Speaking with other members on Basecamp

21% Attending an event or meeting run by MARCH

15% Applying for Plus Funds

12% Taking part in MARCH research activities

What have MARCH members already gained?

2019   **2020**

57% → **70%** Learnt about new research

47% → **49%** Increased awareness of practice

33% → **38%** Felt more connected to others in the field

24% → **35%** Increased understanding of policy developments

22% → **30%** Made new connections

13% → **20%** Applied for research funding

14% → **18%** Increased own community engagement

OUR MEMBER'S VIEWS

"The collaborations made are second to none."

"Knowing where to go to for resources has been invaluable."

"I am inspired by the network and am just taking my time to engage more."

"The newsletter is so comprehensive and is such a valuable source of up to date information on practice, research, policy and funding!"

"We now regularly disseminate research findings to our audiences."

"The highlight for me has been seeing our sector better informed about policy and research developments."

"I'm feeling buoyed by increased awareness of the quality of research in this field."

"I feel much more enthused by social prescribing approaches to mental health."

"As an ECR, it's great to feel highlighted and supported by the network, through Twitter spotlights etc. It's also great ECRs can be so actively involved in research grants and events."

WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL:

What do people feel we're doing well?

◊   Members are encouraged to contribute and collaborate ★★★★☆

◊   Members are achieving more together than they could alone ★★★★☆

◊   There are strategic goals and objectives for the network ★★★★☆

◊   Network activities reflect network goals ★★★★☆

◊   The network is creating value for members ★★★★☆

What have been the highlights?

◊   "Seeing the impact that projects have"

◊   "Getting and sharing information about policy"

◊   "Seeing our organisation represented in a newsletter"

◊   "Listening to the podcasts"

◊   "Seeing so many people become engaged in this area"

◊   "The November conference, which was exceptional!"

◊   "The newsletters, which contain superb material, great articles and super inspiring projects!"

I value the MARCH Network, and both the research and networking opportunities it has offered: I am part of three special interest groups, and a recipient of Plus Funds. Through the networking events and online communications, I enjoyed meeting other people working in the same field. MARCH Network Plus Funding also enables me to lead a research project, focusing on community-based mental health inclusive choirs/singing groups and their leaders. I am thrilled to be working with community organisations and singing groups/choirs to develop resources, which will benefit choir/singing group leaders and people with mental health needs.

**Yoon Irons,
Research Fellow at
University of Derby**

My experience of being part of the MARCH network has been an extremely positive one right from the beginning. As the director of a relatively new charity I was keen to connect with other people in the field, and when I came across the MARCH network, it seemed like the perfect place to do that, offering the opportunity to meet people from the academic world, as well as from the public, private, and charitable sectors. Any initial doubts I had that the network might not be relevant for small charitable organisations like ours, were soon allayed, and I was delighted to be asked to co-chair the newly formed SIG: Nature, Outdoors and Mental Health. It has been a pleasure to watch the membership of this SIG grow from a handful of people to over 130, and particularly pleasing to see the diverse backgrounds of individuals who have joined the group. It was wonderful to host an initial meeting at the Herbarium in Kew Gardens, and whilst disappointing to have had to cancel another meeting this year due to Covid, the interest we had, again from all sectors, and from private individuals, illustrates the success of the network. As a direct result of being part of MARCH, I met Dr Kaye Richards from Liverpool John Moores University, co-chair of our SIG, and we have worked together over the past 18 months on a number of projects, one of which was a successful application for the network's Plus Funds. The opportunity for organisations like ours to collaborate with academics on new research projects is a huge strength of the network, and the partnership Kaye and I have formed through MARCH is one that is likely to last for many years.

**Alison Greenwood,
Dose of Nature,
SIG Co-Chair – Nature,
Outdoors and Mental
Health**

As an early career researcher, being a MARCH Network member has been an invaluable experience. I've had the opportunity to connect, collaborate and knowledge-exchange with researchers, community organisations, individuals with lived experience, policymakers, and healthcare bodies within an interdisciplinary lens. I've been able to develop my skills and understanding of the area through leading on projects and events, including being a co-author on a scoping review for the World Health Organisation and on a new multi-level mechanisms of action framework, linking community and leisure engagement to health, under the mentorship and support of Dr Daisy Fancourt. Additionally, I've organised and coordinated events for ECRs in the field to learn and network and have been actively involved with sandpit funding days and their Arts on Prescription conference. This has not only been a great way to learn but a fantastic way to network and build collaborations. Lastly, the MARCH Network provides ongoing support through their social media and newsletters, and during COVID-19, their outputs have been a valuable and uplifting resource for many.

**Saoirse Finn, ECR
Steering Group Member**

OUR SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

We have 12 SIGs on the following themes:

Arts, Crafts and Mental Health

Interdisciplinary Research Methods

Nature, Outdoors and Mental Health

Digital Community Assets and Mental Health

Historic Environment and Mental Health

Singing and Mental Health

Early Career Researcher Steering Group

Shared Reading: Literature, Libraries and Mental Health

Evaluation and Ethics in the Arts and Mental Health

Arts and Health Practitioner Support

Hip Hop, Spoken Word and Mental Health

Archaeology and Mental Health

Selection of icons sourced from flaticon.com

Members have spoken warmly of the benefits of the SIGs:

"

It's been extremely positive, bringing me into contact with people from other fields I would never otherwise have met

A highlight was being co-chair of a SIG, hosting a first meeting with a fairly small attendance, but then watching the numbers grow to 130 members "

The SIGs have played a key role in supporting me to develop research ideas connected to clinical practice and to link me in with a community of professionals "

"

I've met some really useful research contacts who have been wonderful supports to help me shape my heritage-based programme

OUR PLUS FUNDS

At the start of 2020, we funded 8 Sandpits on the following themes:

◊ Social prescribing for mental health

◊ Social prescribing for mild cognitive impairment

◊ Digital community assets and mental health

◊ Singing and mental health

◊ Engaging people with lived experience of mental illness

◊ Community assets and mental health tribunals

◊ Nature connectedness

◊ Archeology and veteran mental health & wellbeing

In the summer of 2020 we funded 7 more research projects:

£50K high-priority projects:

◊ Developing guidelines for involving people experiencing mental ill-health in heritage projects — Solent University

◊ Developing evidence-based practice and resources for community singing leaders in mental-health contexts — University of Derby

◊ Natural outdoor environments and mental health: developing sustainability indicators using a cross-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder approach — University of Exeter

◊ Sustainability as a behaviour? Exploring the sustainability of community assets for mental health using the Behaviour Change Wheel and the Theoretical Domains Framework — University of East London

The sandpit event was great, and felt like a good starting point to bring research and practice together

I am sharing some of the new things that I have learnt with others in my professional / peer network. I am likely to be applying for funding for a project that relates to some of my new learning

From a sandpit event we are in the process of developing two grant applications, which we plan to submit next year

I have received funding for a sandpit event, and a follow on 'plus' project. The sandpit facilitated the development of a new multi-stakeholder colloborative team. The project is to commence soon and we're looking forward to gaining insight from individuals with lived experience of mental ill-health

"

I was part of a team who received £50,000 research funding for a project about sustainability in green social prescribing. As a clinician working in the third sector, I met a researcher and we were then able to put this project together and were delighted to be successful in our application

Having worked in the area of archaeology and veterans' mental health for some time, the financial support from MARCH has really enabled this work to expand, allowing us to achieve far more and hopefully supporting the veteran-focused archaeological initiatives through our work

"

Even for applications that were not successful, MARCH provided detailed feedback and support in identifying other sources of funding.

In total, MARCH members have received over £16 million in research funding from other funding sources in response to their involvement with the network, with a further £10 million of funding grants under review.

£20K innovation grants:

◊ Life at a distance: a pilot study of two mutual aid services to support vulnerable individuals in coastal communities — Teeside University

◊ Participation in the arts in individuals with mental ill-health in South London: a population-based survey — King's College London

◊ Digital community assets and mental health: investigating the impact of digital platforms on the support provided by creative communities — University of East London

"

Through the process of applying we made connections and honed our approaches

Sadly we were unsuccessful in the funding bid to MARCH but since then we have received some funding from other sources!

A highlight for me was applying for funding as there was helpful feedback even on my unsuccessful application

"

MARCH DURING COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unexpected challenges for many individuals and organisations within the MARCH Network. Some MARCH members found the pandemic provided challenges and, for others, it provided opportunities.

CHALLENGES

"

It has been harder to follow up on connections made through the MARCH Network or learning gained through my involvement because conferences and other events at which I planned to present findings, network, and make connections, were all cancelled

"

My organisation has engaged less. Staff furloughed. Sector decimated

"

I just haven't had the capacity to engage more with the network

OPPORTUNITIES

"

I am not sure I would have heard of you otherwise. Lockdown gave me time to pause and reflect

"

I don't think it has affected the ability of the MARCH Network to communicate with each other

"

During the COVID-19 lockdown, I was furloughed and took a complete break from everything work related. I feel more energised now to start using MARCH more

As a network, we responded rapidly by drawing on the expertise and connections within the MARCH Network:

1

We published a Creative Isolation page, profiling the online work of network members and other organisations to support mental health and wellbeing. It has received over 142,000 hits and was cited as an example of excellence in COVID-19 response by Arts Council England.

20% of MARCH members reported using the Creative Isolation page themselves.

"I have just discovered your fantastic Creative Isolation site, having completed the UCL COVID survey. What an amazing job you have done! Honestly - the best list of these types of resources about!!! I have shared with many of my friends. Thank you all for your work. We appreciate what you are doing, and the care you show for people."

"The March Network and Creative Isolation project was a fantastic way of seeing how solidarity is key in our fight to maintain the arts at the forefront of a recovery curriculum and wider extra-curricular and skills training for the future generation."

2

We launched the COVID Minds Network to support and encourage collaboration between teams from over 130 longitudinal mental health studies running across 70 different countries. Over 6,000 people have already engaged with the resources provided by the network and we are working with members to undertake cross-national comparisons of findings about the impact of the pandemic.

"I've enjoyed having a support group of other researchers during lockdown!"

"It's so great to see all these international efforts to investigate mental health and its relationship with COVID-19."

3

We established the COVID-19 Social Study to map the psychological and social experiences of individuals during the pandemic. Additionally funded by the Wellcome Trust and Nuffield Foundation, this study has gathered over 800,000 surveys from over 72,000 individuals since March and we have additionally collected over 15,000 qualitative testimonies of experiences during the pandemic from participants and undertaken over 200 telephone interviews with specific groups. The study is providing real-time data on the impact of the pandemic to SAGE, wider policy makers, community organisations and the public, to date leading to over 70 reports and scientific papers including on topics such as the impact of social restrictions on depression and anxiety, the mental health impact of the pandemic for people working within the cultural and creative industries, and how people have been using social, cultural and community activities as strategies to cope. We have also contributed to over 500 newspaper articles, TV and radio programmes, podcasts and blogs.

36% of MARCH members have been taking part in our COVID-19 research.

"Your work has been really helpful and I have used your data updates in a number of presentations internally and externally to my trust — thank you! I refer to it as one of the best surveys because you set up before lockdown, have a large sample and are longitudinal."
NHS Trust Research and Development Director

"Filling out the questionnaire each week has really helped me think about my own (and my family and friends') mental health and coping strategies during the last few months. I'm so grateful to all involved for that weekly prompt to reflect and adapt and wish you all the best of luck with the analysis and output." Covid Social Study Participant

Many members feel MARCH is even more relevant as we emerge from the pandemic:

"

COVID-19 has affected everything and impacts on so many people's mental health at the moment. It highlights the need for networks such as yours to keep mental health at the forefront

"

COVID-19 made the network more relevant. The research outcomes and data were powerful support to frontline work

"

I feel that there is an even greater impetus to our work in light of the way people are isolated and struggling with mental wellbeing. What is being discovered and shared is extremely timely

"

I feel that I will be drawing on the offers of the network more fully as we travel through this period of dramatic social and other change. Uncertainty about funding and needing to work more closely with partnerships and collaborations will mean that we will need to draw more deeply on the connections made possible through the network

"

MARCH has significantly helped us feel less isolated during a time when our value as an arts organisation is being questioned on many levels, whilst we are trying to do our most challenging work – but you're out there – listening and supporting!

LOOKING FORWARDS

We asked members what they thought we should be focusing on in our final year and beyond and several themes emerged. We propose to address these in the following way:

Priority 1: Promoting the work MARCH has carried out as much as possible, "shouting about what has been achieved"

What we propose to do: Across 2021, we will be working to produce more policy briefings and summaries of the research that MARCH has undertaken as a network. We will also be developing an online training programme explaining some of the tools we've been developing including the "mechanisms of action" the Network has identified.

"The research has been tremendously useful – this will be the MARCH legacy"

Priority 2: Continue the SIGs and help them to become self-sustaining
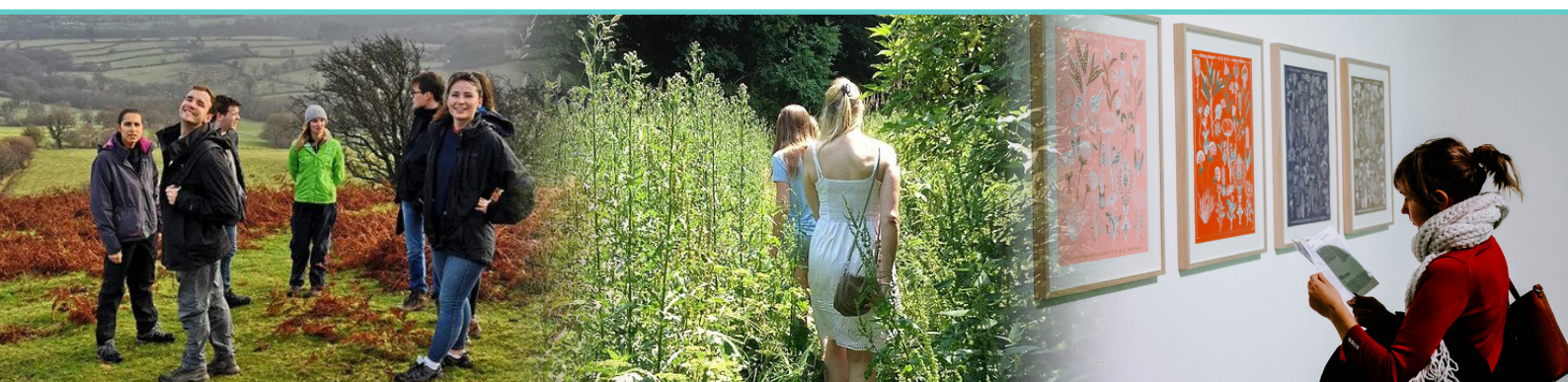
What we propose to do: We will be working closely with the SIG leaders to explore how to transition the SIGs into being able to function more independently. This will include identifying, where appropriate, other umbrella organisations that can provide a new home and resources and helping SIGs to develop their strategies.

"We need the SIGs as a way for the community and networking to stay intact"

Priority 3: Provide more opportunities for virtual events

What we propose to do: We have a number of virtual events in the pipeline, including focus groups identifying the "active ingredients" of arts and cultural activities with community organisations and researchers, and round-tables exploring the barriers and enablers of interdisciplinary research in this field. We are also planning some digital showcase events (see Priority 4)

"Virtual events provide opportunities for innovative partnerships and the development of ideas"

Priority 4: Maintain the project website even beyond the end of the network
What we propose to do: We will be working to transition our current website to a lasting "legacy website" where we can host our resources, research and spotlights on best practice in a way that will endure beyond the end of the network. We plan to host a MARCH Virtual Festival in the autumn of 2021, launching this website and hosting a curated programme of talks, discussions, showcases & taster sessions.

"We need a huge celebration of projects around the UK"

Priority 5: Help members to maintain their engagement beyond the end of MARCH
What we propose to do: We will be exploring with MARCH members how we can maintain the connections that people have built, including scoping options such as a lasting MARCH contact database. We will also be working to help the most important functions of the network to become self-sustaining.

"The 'space' that has been created to collaborate must continue"

"I didn't realise MARCH was ending!
I would love it to continue"

I have thoroughly enjoyed being part of the MARCH Network. The chance to share ideas with people with a variety of different experiences has been invaluable in supporting both my professional and personal development. As a recipient of both MARCH Sandpit and MARCH Plus funding, I can truly say that this has provided the opportunity to explore links between wellbeing and archaeology, and heritage more broadly, that wouldn't have otherwise been open to us. Through MARCH my collaborators, Dr Paul Everill and Dr Louise Baxter, and I have broadened our networks and further collaborative opportunities, and our cross-disciplinary working has been supported and valued by MARCH. We've also established the Archaeology and Wellbeing SIG, which is home to many a lively debate. MARCH's commitment and willingness to listen to new ideas around evaluation, and their championing of the voice of those with lived experience, is to be commended, and should be a model for other organisations. Belonging to a community like MARCH, with whom I share personal and professional values, is a joy and a highlight of my academic journey to date.

**Karen Burnell,
Senior Lecturer in
Psychology at
Solent University**

THANK YOU

Finally, we'd like to say thank you to all of our members for your engagement over the past 2 years and to UKRI for funding us.

> It's fulfilling to be part of MARCH and my engagement and joy in research has been boosted because of MARCH

> A valuable resource for all clinicians, practitioners, researchers and supporters of wellbeing and mental health improvement

> The MARCH network has provided me with a home within which to house my clinical and research interests

> The MARCH network is a diverse community of passionate people committed to improving mental health for all. It's a wonderful thing

> I have been impressed by the scope and inclusivity of MARCH Network activity

> A really necessary network and funder, particularly in these uncertain times

> Keep up the amazing work! The network is brilliant

> I think you have done everything you could possibly do!

UK Research and Innovation

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