Arts in Health Volunteers
Evaluation Report

Northern Care Alliance

July 2025

helpforce

Executive summary

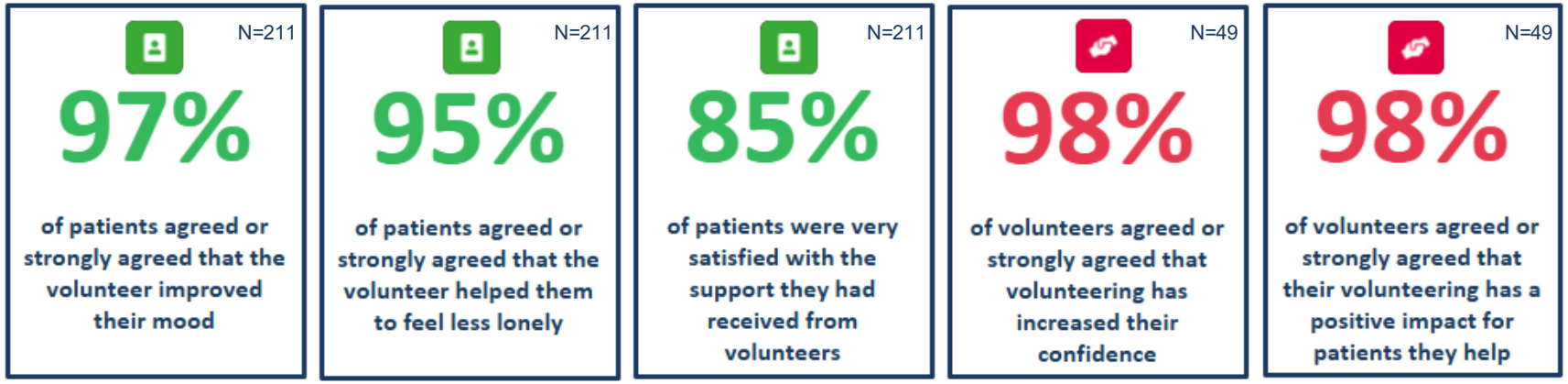
The project

The Arts in Health service, launched in August 2023, provides art therapy to patients in wards across Northern Care Alliance (NCA). With activities supported and delivered by volunteers, the service aims to have a positive impact on patients physical, mental and emotional recovery or wellbeing.

Evaluation approach

Using its established *Insight & Impact* evaluation service, Helpforce follows a consistent methodology to determine the impact of volunteering roles on health and wellbeing outcomes. Target outcomes are identified across a range of beneficiaries representing the people and organisations involved, and then we collect the necessary data to prove and evidence the outcomes. For this evaluation, Helpforce introduced a patient and volunteer feedback survey to measure the impact the Arts in Health service had had.

Key findings



Conclusions & recommendations

The Arts in Health service has resulted in a multitude of benefits for both patients and volunteers. As well as high levels of satisfaction with the support received, patients feedback illustrates that the volunteer's support has resulted in positive impacts on patient emotional wellbeing, Further, volunteers themselves reported multiple benefits, including increased confidence and development of new skills, as well as a feeling of being able to make a difference to those to whom they provided support.

Service overview

"The arts can help keep us well, aid our recovery and support longer lives better lived".[1]

- Following the establishment of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing in 2014, an inquiry into existing art-based interventions within health and care was undertaken. Within their findings report, the Parliamentary Group suggested that arts can help to tackle many of the major system challenges including ageing, long-term health conditions, loneliness and mental health.
- With a vision to encourage and incorporate the use of arts, creativity, and complimentary therapies within the services provided across the Northern Care Alliance (NCA), the volunteering team introduced two new volunteer programmes – Arts in Health and Complementary Therapies. These programmes aimed to have a positive impact on service users' and colleagues' physical, mental and emotional recovery or wellbeing.
- The Arts in Health service, launched in August 2023, provides art therapy to patients in wards across NCA. A paid-member of staff manages the programme, but activities are supported and delivered by volunteers. Activities include painting, flower pressing and pottery.
- The Helpforce Insight and Impact team partnered with NCA to evaluate the Arts in Health Programme. The following report shares findings from the final evaluation analysis, completed in July 2025.

Please note: Reporting on the Complementary Therapy role has been completed separately, and the evaluation report is available on the Helpforce website.

[1] *All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, Inquiry report - Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing, July 2017*

Evaluation approach

Helpforce's approach to evaluating...

Using its established *Insight & Impact* evaluation service, Helpforce follows a consistent methodology to determine the impact of volunteering roles on health and wellbeing outcomes. Target outcomes are identified across a range of beneficiaries representing the people and organisations involved, and then we collect the necessary data to prove and evidence the outcomes.

The Arts in Health programme aimed to achieve the following outcomes...

Patients

- Improved emotional wellbeing
- Reduced feelings of loneliness / social isolation
- Positive involvement in meaningful activities
- Satisfied with their volunteer support experience

Volunteer

- Improved confidence and sense of purpose
- Increased social connections
- Develop new skills
- Confidence that time spent volunteering is of benefit to patients, staff and the organisation
- Feel well supported in undertaking their role
- Satisfied with and happy in their role

The evaluation involved two data collection methods:

- A **patient survey.** For those who participated in the activities, questions were asked in relation to their experience of using the service and the difference it had made to them. **211 patient survey responses** were collected between **February 2024 and May 2025**.
- A **volunteer survey,** asking questions about their experience of delivering the volunteering role. **49 volunteer survey responses** were collected between **April 2024 and April 2025.**

211

patient responses

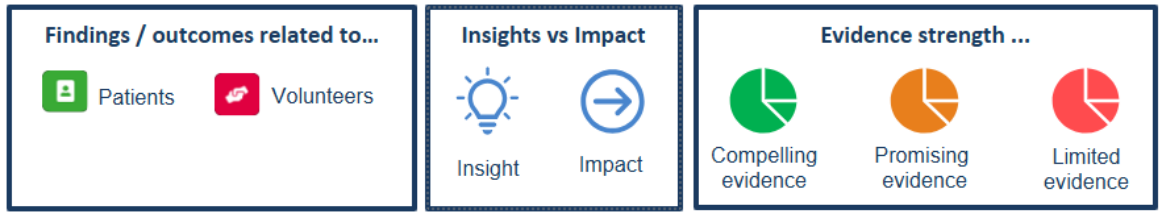
Sites responses were received from:

Salford – **70** responses *(33%)*
Oldham – **61** responses *(29%)*
Bury – **60** responses *(28%)*
Rochdale – **10** responses *(5%)*
10 patients did not know or did not provide site/ward *(5%)*

49

volunteer responses

Throughout the report, data findings are linked back to the beneficiary using icons at the top right-hand side of the screen. Evidence strength is also rated used icons. These icons are as follows...



Please note that chart labels under 4 or 4% have been removed to aid chart readability.

Volunteer activity

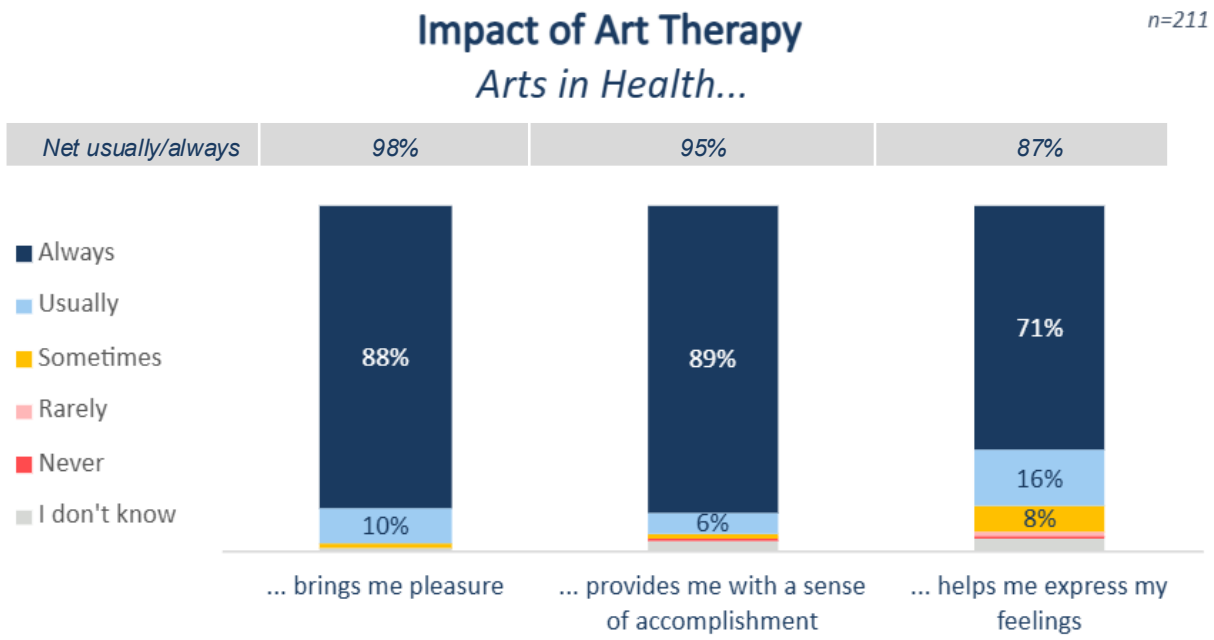
520

patients supported

- Between August 2023 and November 2024, it was reported that Arts in Health volunteers had supported over 500 patients to undertake art therapy activities.
- Within the volunteer survey (n=49), individuals undertaking the Arts in Health role were asked about their volunteering activity...
    - 71% respondents reported that they had been in the role for three months or less. 18% of volunteers reported they had been in their role between 3-6 months, and 10% of volunteers had been in the role between 6-12 months.
    - 96% respondents reported that they volunteer at least once a week. 2% of volunteers reported that volunteered daily, and the remaining 2% reported they volunteer less than once a week, but at least once a month.
    - On average, volunteers reported to spend an average of 11 hours per month volunteering in their Arts in Health role. However, time spent ranged from 2 hours to 64 hours per month.

Impact: Patient engagement in meaningful activities

- Patients were asked three questions to determine if they felt participating in art therapy was meaningful. These questions were adapted from the Engagement in Meaningful Activities Survey.[2]
- We have seen high levels of agreement with these statements:
  - 98% of respondents reported that participating in Arts in Health activities always or usually **brings them pleasure**.
  - 95% of respondents reported the activities always or usually provide them with a **sense of accomplishment**.
  - Whilst a lower level of agreement, still 87% of patients reported that Arts in Health always or usually helps them to **express their feelings**.
- These findings suggest that the programme has allowed patients to engage in meaningful activities whilst in hospital. This was further supported by feedback provided by patients...



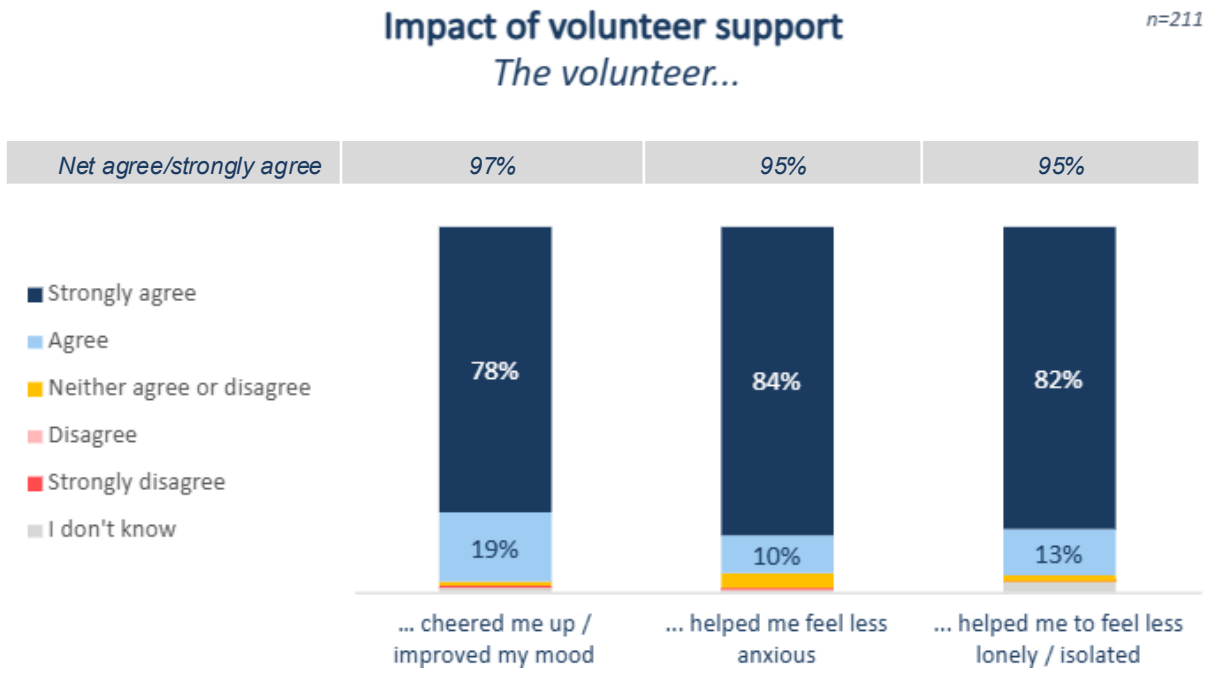
"I enjoy it - it makes a change from staying on bed all day doing nothing."

"The activities really help with handling emotions and making us feel more relaxed. I am very impressed by the support it means a lot to me and other patients."

"It brought me joy. I found it fulfilling because I had never done it before."

[2] Do Live Well, Engagement in Meaningful Activities Survey, last accessed December 2024.

Impact: Patient wellbeing



- Patients were also asked about the difference they felt volunteer support had made to their wellbeing. Again, high levels of agreement were seen in relation to all three statements:
  - 97% agreed the **volunteers helped to improve their mood**, with 78% strongly agreeing.
  - 95% agreed volunteers helped them to **feel less anxious**, with 84% strongly agreeing.
  - And finally, 95% of respondents agreed volunteers helped them to **feel less isolated**, with 82% strongly agreeing.
- The high levels of agreement with these statements, particularly the proportion of individuals strongly agreeing, indicates Arts in Health volunteers have had a positive impact on individuals' emotional wellbeing and in reducing feelings of loneliness. This was further illustrated in comments from patients, who also highlighted additional benefits, such as distraction from pain...

"I think it's a good way to get your mind off things. As soon as you come to hospital you feel stressed, but I totally forgot about it ."

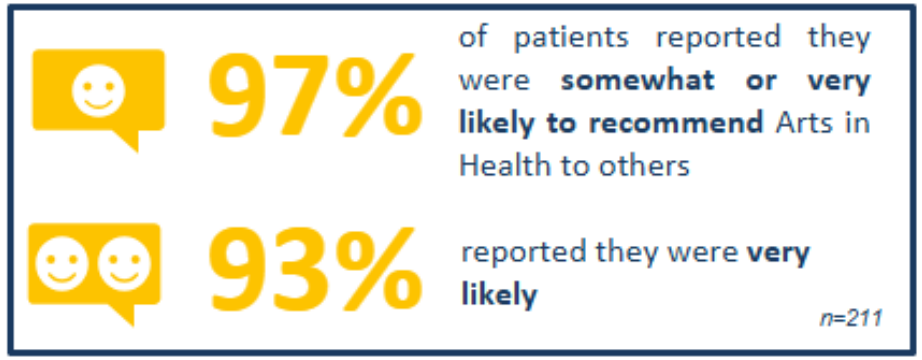
"It's a good facility for patients. I highly recommend it - my anxiety before was terrible. It alleviated my anxiety totally."

"I had less stress. I enjoyed it. I have a broken shoulder, but pottery distracted me from pain. I am happy with the volunteer treatment I received."

"I feel happier because I was isolated on my own. It positively affected my health."

Impact: Patient satisfaction

- Finally, patients were asked if they were satisfied with their Arts in Health experience.
  - Feedback from patients was overwhelmingly positive with **all but two patients reporting they were satisfied or very satisfied** with the support they had received from volunteers.
  - The two remaining respondents selected very unsatisfied, however it appears possible this was in error, as they provided positive responses to other survey questions and left positive comments about their experience.
  - **97% of patients reported they were somewhat or very likely to recommend** the Arts in Health service to others who needed similar care or treatment, with 93% of patients being very likely.
  - No patients suggested they were unlikely to recommend the service, however three reported being neutral and four responded 'I don't know'.
- Again, patients provided positive feedback about their experience of using the service…



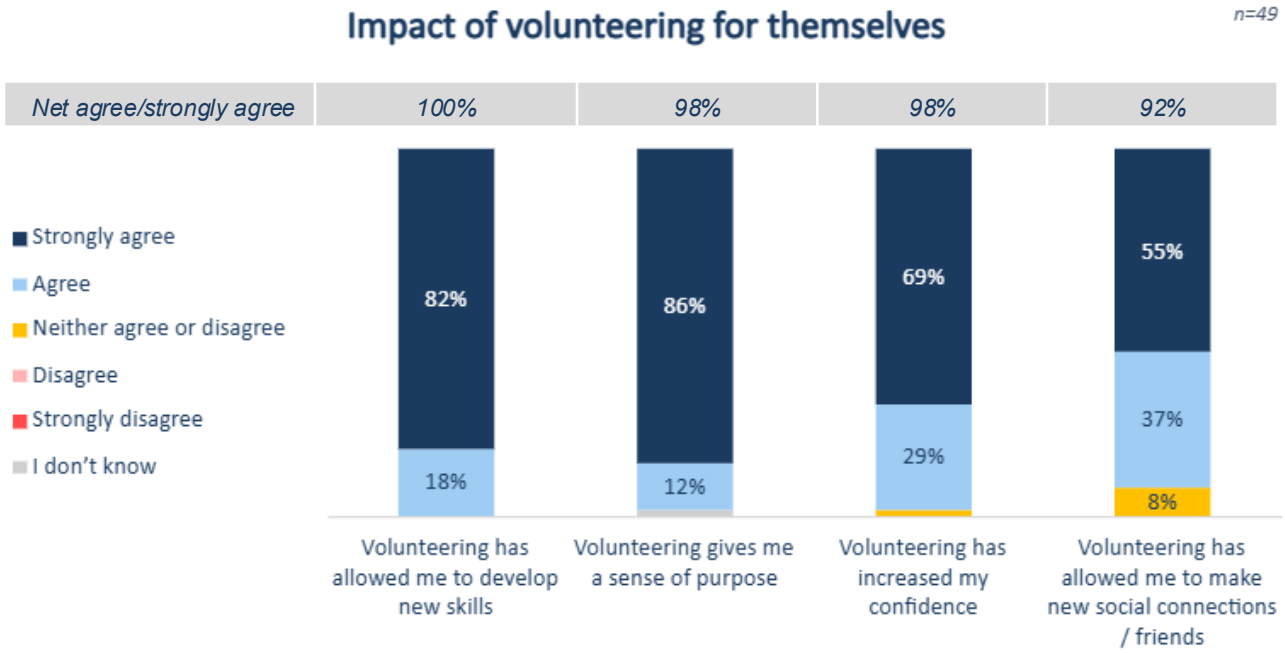
"I didn't know that your activities existed. I think what NCA does is wonderful."

"I think it's fantastic! It speeds the patient's recovery - I would definitely do it again."

"I have been here two weeks, and this is the first time I've spoken to people. I certainly recommend it to anybody."

Patient artwork

Impact: Volunteer outcomes



- Within the volunteer survey, individuals who delivered the Arts in Health role were asked for their feedback on the difference volunteering had made to them. Of the 49 respondents to the survey…
  - All agreed or strongly agreed that they had **developed new skills**.
  - 98% agreed or strongly agreed volunteering had given them a **sense of purpose** and **increased their confidence**.
  - 92% agreed or strongly agreed the role had allowed them to **make new social connections**.
- Volunteers provided further comment, reflecting in particular on the additional confidence they have built through volunteering…

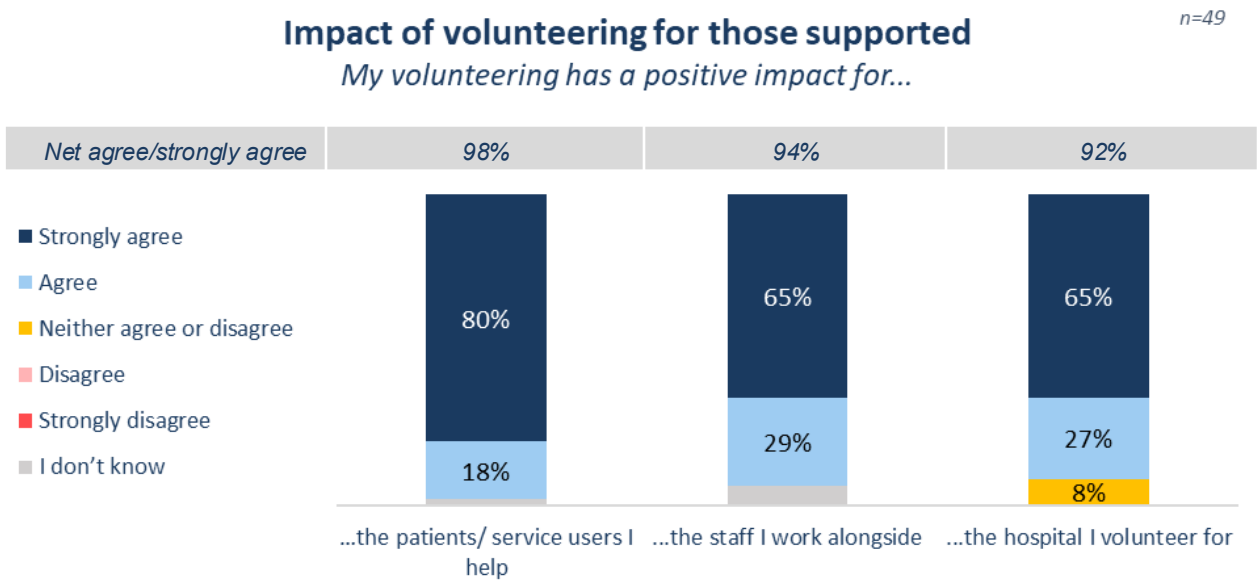
"I am really enjoying my experience of being a volunteer, communicating and collaborating as a team has boosted my confidence. I am really happy."

"Every week exceeds my expectations! It's a joy to take part, doing something different to the rest of my week. I always feel uplifted when I come away. "

"I gain more confidence. Positive impact on mind as well."

Impact: Volunteer perceptions of role impact

- Volunteers were asked if they felt that their role was making a difference to the people they support. Of the 49 volunteers who participated in the survey…
  - 98% agreed or strongly agreed that their volunteering has a **positive impact for patients**.
  - 94% agreed or strongly agreed their volunteering has a **positive impact for staff**.
  - 92% agreed or strongly agreed their volunteering has a **positive impact for the hospital**.
  - Whilst some individuals were neutral or stated they didn't know what impact their role was having, no respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with these statements.
- Volunteers provided further insight into the difference they felt they were making to patients through their Arts in Health role…

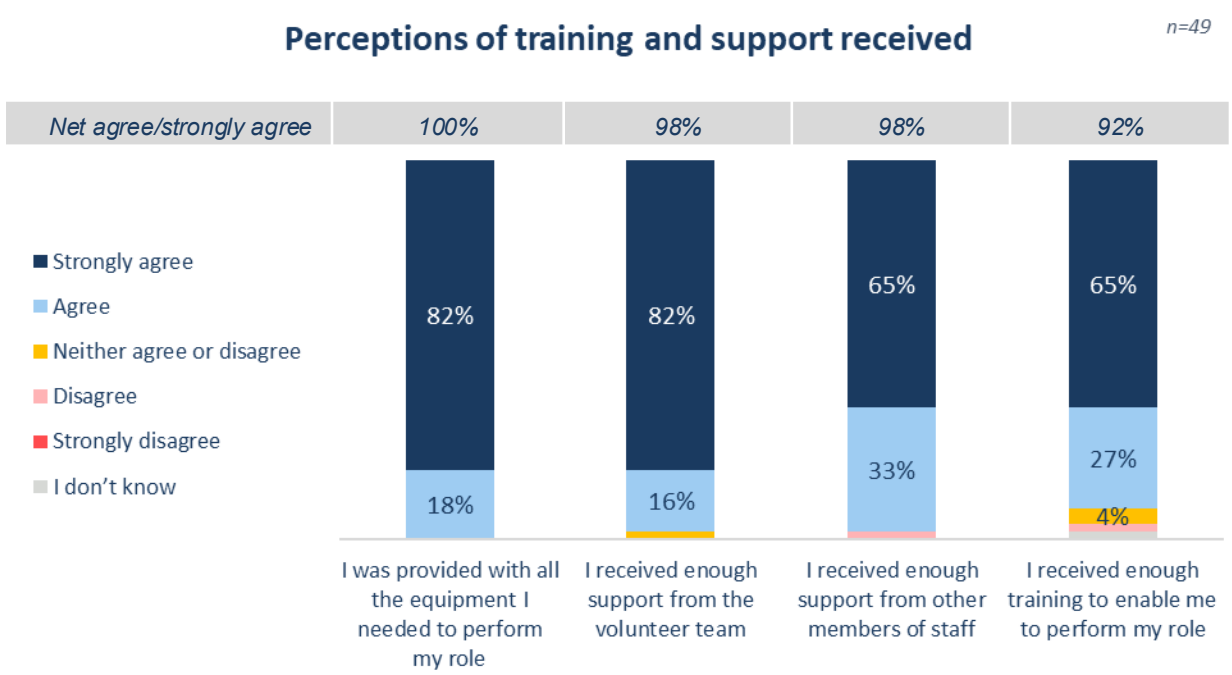


"I enjoy my volunteering role in art therapy because I feel we bring a little bit of cheer to the patients' day."

"I can really see how arts in health benefits the patients mental and physical wellbeing."

"It has showed the impact that creative activities have on the emotional wellbeing of patients that nurses don't have time to focus on."

Impact: Volunteer support



- Volunteers were also asked to reflect upon the support they had received in undertaking their role, including and training or equipment requirements.
  - All agreed or strongly agreed that they had been **provided with the equipment required** to enable them to perform their Arts in Health role.
  - 98% agreed or strongly agreed they had received enough support from both the volunteering team and other members of staff. 2% of respondents disagreed that they had received enough support from the wider staff team, but did not provide any comment as to why they felt this way.
  - 92% reported they had received **sufficient training** to undertake their role. 2% of respondents disagreed with this statement, and the remainder were neutral or did not know. However, none of these individuals provided any further context, and indeed three of the four provided positive comments about their overall experience.
- Two volunteers left specific feedback about the support they had received…

"The other volunteers and HCA are also excellent to work alongside. The patients today really enjoyed the activities and engaged well."

"I look forward to volunteering every week - I feel very happy and supported by the team of volunteers we have here and the members of staff who guide and support us through the activity."

Impact: Volunteer satisfaction

- Finally, volunteers were asked if they were satisfied with their volunteering experience.
    - All respondents said their volunteering role had **met or exceeded their expectations**, with 67% reporting it had exceeded them.
    - 98% of volunteers were **satisfied with their volunteering experience**, with 82% reporting they were very satisfied.
    - One individual did report that they were very unsatisfied with their volunteering role. However, this was possibly selected in error as they left positive comments to all other questions and did not provide any further context to suggest they were unsatisfied.
- Overarchingly, volunteer feedback therefore suggests they are enjoying their volunteering role and get satisfaction from supporting patients and staff – in return seeing the positive benefits this has for them.

"I had another brilliant time volunteering with some lovely patients and members of staff. I really enjoyed the experience."

"It was mutually beneficial for all involved and boosted our mood."

"I had a great experience today... It was fantastic to positively interact and engage with the patients and staff."

Conclusions and recommendations

- The evaluation report findings demonstrate that the Arts in Health programme has had multiple benefits for patients. Indeed, findings suggest the programme has achieved several of the anticipated outcomes for patients, including improved emotional wellbeing, reduced isolation and an increased engagement in meaningful activities.
- These positive outcomes reflect the growing recognition of the role of art-based interventions within a health and care setting, aligning with the Creative Health (2017) report[3], which emphasises the value of arts in promoting wellbeing and social connection. Within healthcare settings, such benefits not only support patients' emotional needs but also contribute to person-centred care environments.
- Further, volunteers reported to be having positive experiences in delivering the role, with many agreeing their volunteering has supported their development of confidence, sense of purpose and further development skills.
- The Arts in Health programme is currently funded to run until Summer 2025. The Arts in Health volunteering team would like to work alongside Trust senior leadership to obtain further funding to run the programme for an additional 12 months. This will enable the team to further scale up delivery of the programme across additional wards within the four care organisations.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks go to the volunteering team at Northern Care Alliance, in particular to Caroline Pollard, Arts in Health Lead, and Lucy Boulter, Head of Volunteering.

We would also like to thank the patients and volunteers who spent their time providing feedback, without whom this analysis would not be possible.

[3] *All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, Inquiry report - Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing, July 2017*

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Thank you

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