Ward Support Volunteers

Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust

Evaluation Report - September 2024

helpforce

NHS Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust

#bethehelpforce

Contents

Executive summary	3
Service overview	4
Evaluation approach	5
Insight: Volunteer activity	7
Insight: About the volunteers	8
Impact: patient experiences	9
Impact: family/carer experiences	12
Impact: staff experiences	15
Insight: volunteer experiences	20
Conclusions and recommendations	28
Acknowledgements and data limitations	30
Appendices	31

Executive summary

The project

Since October 2022, ward support volunteers have been supporting patients and staff at multiple hospitals in the Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust. The primary objective of this initiative is to enhance the overall experience of patients and their families, while also offering support to staff members.

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 evaluated the impact of the ward support volunteer role on a multitude of patient, family/carer, staff and volunteer outcomes.

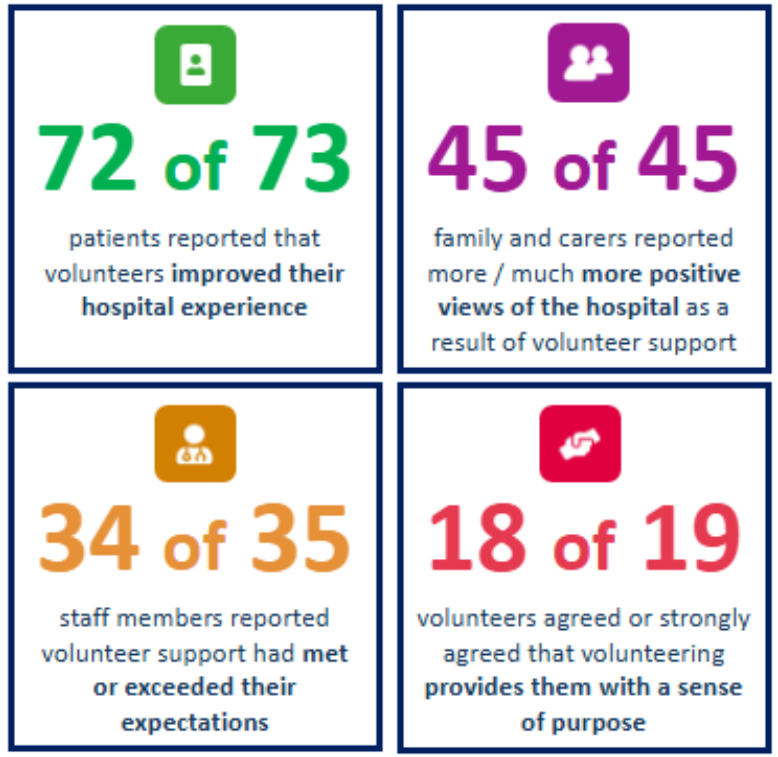
Conclusion

The ward support volunteer role appears to hold many benefits for patients and family members/carers, including improved mood, reduced loneliness, and an improved hospital experience. Indeed, some individuals called for an expansion of the service to provide post-discharge support. Additionally, volunteers report feeling well supported in undertaking their role and their experience appears to have resulted in several positive benefits to their wellbeing and skill development.

Whilst generally appreciative of and satisfied with the support from volunteers, staff members appeared to have mixed views about the impact of the role on their working lives. Analysis suggests that there were some opportunities for improvement, including expanding volunteer responsibilities, providing more information on when volunteers will be available, and additional training/support for volunteers.

Overarchingly, this evaluation highlights that the ward support volunteer role appears to have been successful in achieving its main aim of improving patient and their loved one's experience, illustrating the positive impact that volunteering can have within a health and care setting.

Key findings



Service overview

- In **Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust**, ward support volunteers have been supporting patients and staff since October 2022 across two community hospitals - Ilkeston and Ripley hospitals.
- Following an initial evaluation of the Ward support role at Ilkeston and Ripley Hospitals by Helpforce in June 2023, the service was further extended to Matlock, Ashbourne, and Clay Cross Hospitals.
- The volunteering role aimed to **improve patients and their loved one's experience**, by providing support and companionship to individuals during their hospital stay.
- It is also hoped that the role will provide **support to staff members** and result in **positive outcomes for volunteers.**
- Ward support volunteer responsibilities included:
    - Offering companionship to patients, by engaging in conversation and offering a listening ear, playing cards, and sharing music or books;
    - Helping with other ward tasks, such as stocking ward supplies, folding bags, and cutting aprons;
    - And, assisting patients to have virtual meetings with their loved ones.

At the time of evaluation, the service had 10 active volunteers delivering support across 4 wards, on a weekly basis for 2-3 hours.

NHS
Derbyshire Community Health Services
NHS Foundation Trust

Evaluation approach: Outcomes

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 evidence the outcomes.

Following the initial evaluation of the ward support volunteer service, Helpforce continued to support the Trust with ongoing data collection to determine the impact of the service.

This evaluation sought to answer the following questions about the project:

- Do ward support volunteers improve the patients' hospital experience?
- Do ward support volunteers enhance the family/carer experience?
- Do ward support volunteers influence staff perceptions towards volunteering?
- What effect has volunteering had for volunteers who participated in the project?

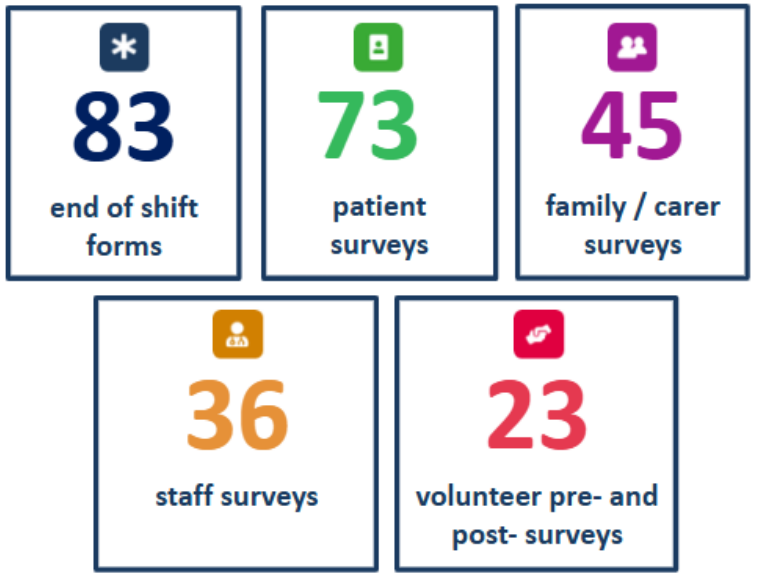
The project supports a multitude of **patient, families/carers, staff and volunteer outcomes.**

Evaluation approach: Methodology

The evaluation consisted of five different collection methods:

- **End of shift form,** for volunteers to document what activities they undertook during their shift.
- **Patient surveys,** asking questions regarding the volunteer support they received and their hospital experience.
- **Family / Carer surveys**, asking questions around perceptions of the quality of care and support received by their loved one.
- **Staff surveys,** including questions pertaining to staff member perceptions of volunteering support and the difference it made to them.
- **Volunteer surveys**, completed after induction but before actively volunteering (referred to as the 'pre-survey') and again after being in the role for some time (referred to as the 'post-survey'). Volunteers were asked about their experience of undertaking the role and the benefits volunteering had resulted in for them.

The total number of responses received were as follows:

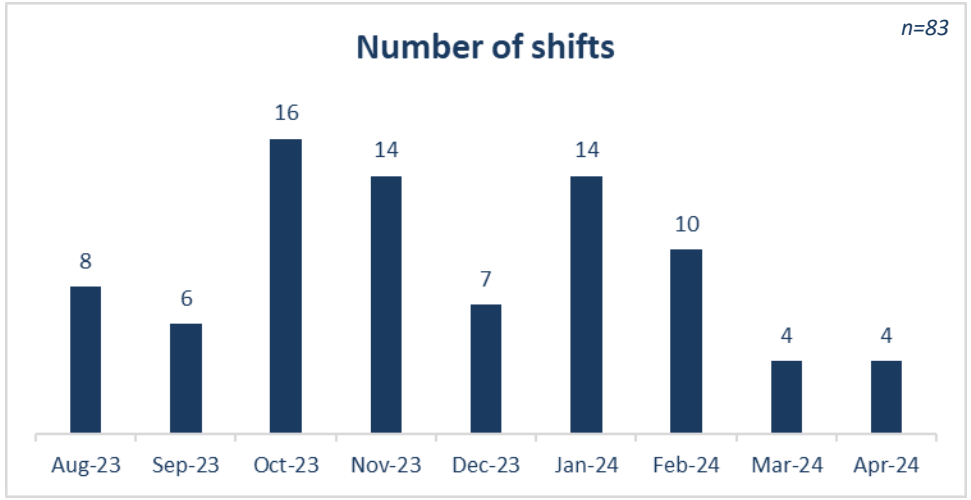


Throughout the report, data findings are linked back to the beneficiary and evidence type using icons at the top right-hand side of the screen. Evidence strength is also rated using icons. These icons are as follows…

Insight: Volunteering activity

Between August 2023 and April 2024, volunteers were asked to complete an end of shift form detailing the activities they had undertaken on the ward. This data provides a picture the types of support volunteers provided to patients and their loved ones by ward support volunteers.

- End of shift forms were completed 83 times, with a peak of activity seen in October 2023.
- During this time, volunteers provided support to nearly 300 patients, equating to an average of 4 people supported per shift. Activities included providing companionship or undertaking activities with them such as games or crafts.
- Additionally, 30 visitors (family members / carers) and over 80 staff members received support from ward support volunteers.
- Volunteers also recorded almost 50 additional activities that they undertook in support of the ward during their time volunteering. These included supporting menu selections, greeting family members and visitors, and setting up equipment.



296 patients supported

82 staff supported

30 family members / careers supported

47 additional activities undertaken

Please note: End of shift forms were not completed for every volunteering shift, and they were not introduced until later inthe data collection period. This data should therefore be considered partially representative of volunteering activity, but the volumes of people supported by volunteers is likely to be greater than reported.

Insight: About the volunteers

Upon starting in their role, volunteers were asked for some information about themselves and their motivations behind volunteering.

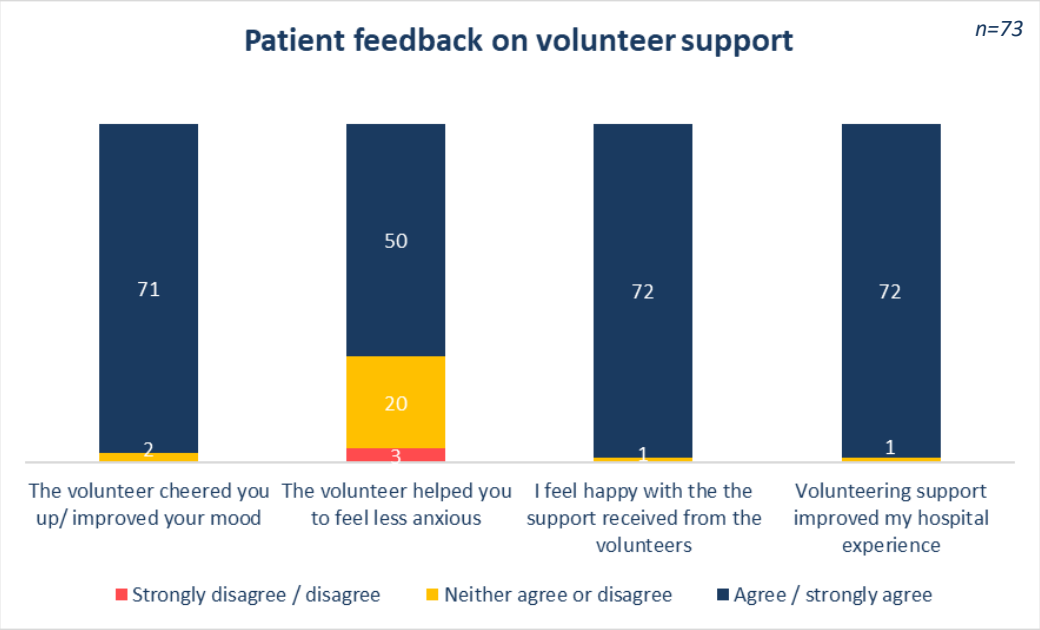
- The majority of volunteers were aged between 16 and 20 years old. One volunteer was aged between 31 and 40, and another was aged between 41 and 50.
- Two volunteers identified as male, however, the majority of volunteers identified as female.
- When asked about their employment status, almost three quarters of volunteers indicated they were students. One individual said they were currently unemployed, and five reported they were in employment.
- 19 of 23 volunteers undertaking the ward support role reported that they this was the first time they had volunteered. Others had taken on various volunteering responsibilities previously.
- Nine volunteers suggested they took on the role to gain skills experiences and opportunities. Additionally, some volunteers suggested they wanted to boost their confidence (4 respondents) and/or to improve their chances of getting a job (4).*
- Over 4 in 5 volunteers reported they were definitely interested in pursuing a career in health and care. The remaining volunteers reported they were fairly interested (4 respondents) or slightly interested (1).

** Responses to this question were not mutually exclusive – volunteer respondents were able to select as many responses as were applicable to them.*

Patient experiences

Impact: Patient experience and wellbeing

Following their interactions with ward support volunteers, patients were asked four questions regarding what difference volunteering support had made to them and their hospital stay.



- In relation to emotional wellbeing, over two thirds of patients agreed or strongly agreed that volunteers helped to relieve anxiety. However, a quarter of patients remained neutral about this statement, with a small number disagreeing. These patients did leave positive feedback about the volunteers, however, explaining it was *"nice to see a friendly face"* and to *"have them on the ward"*.
- Additionally, 97% of patients agreed the volunteer had helped to cheer them up more generally.
- When asked if they were satisfied with the support they had received from volunteers and if volunteer support had positively impacted their hospital experience, almost all patients agreed.

Overarchingly, it appears volunteer support has had a **positive impact on individuals' hospital stays, improving individuals' mood, and helping to reduce anxiety for some**. Patients also cited additional benefits, such as **reducing feelings of loneliness** and isolation…

"I have no family, and my friends do not visit, if it wasn't for the ward volunteers I would not see anyone apart from the hospital staff."

Patient

"A volunteer came in and spoke to me and another patient who was isolating, we had a laugh. It was really nice, she spent about an hour with us, and the fact we hadn't had any visitors for 3 days it was nice to see a friendly face.

Patient

"If I didn't have a volunteer to talk to, I wouldn't speak to anyone. Volunteers keep me company."

Patient

Impact: Additional patient feedback

Patients provided additional feedback on the support they received from the volunteers.

Some patients reflected that they would appreciate the opportunity to keep in touch with volunteers following discharge, **suggesting a possible extension of the service.**

"The ward volunteers made my stay in hospital; I looked forward to seeing them when they were on the ward."

Patient

*"**Can the volunteers stay in touch by phone when I have been discharged?** I have been in hospital a good few weeks and built up a lovely friendship. Be nice to continue chatting."*

Patient

*"The ward volunteer is lovely, friendly and always has time for me, **I wish I could stay in contact with her when I leave hospital.**"*

Patient

*"Always nice to see a friendly face and have a chat. The girls are always friendly, polite and respectful. **It's a shame they cannot come and visit me when I am back at home."***

Patient

"Volunteer comforted me and made me feel less stressed. My family really appreciated this. It has helped with my mental health and wellbeing. I have been to other hospitals and appreciate the volunteer support at Ilkeston."

Patient

"Lovely kind people, make me smile and brighten up my day."

Patient

"Brilliant addition to the amazing NHS staff."

Patient

"As silly as it may sound, seeing the volunteers is the highlight of my day."

Patient

"Very good, kind people giving up their time to keep me company."

Patient

Family / carer experiences

Impact: Family/carer experience and wellbeing

Visitors to the hospital were also asked for their feedback on ward support volunteers, and the difference they felt it made to theirs and their loved ones hospital experience.

- 45 family members / carers were surveyed, of which all agreed or strongly agreed that volunteer support:
  - helped them to feel less anxious during their loved one's hospital stay;
  - improved their and their loved one's hospital experience;
  - and increased their confidence in the quality of care provided.
- Additionally, all respondents reported that, as a result of volunteer support, they had more or much more positive views of the hospital.
- Further, all but one respondent suggested they were likely or extremely likely to recommend the service to others. The individual who suggested they would be unlikely did leave positive comments about their experience of ward support volunteers, stating *"excellent service, well done"*, it therefore may be possible this was selected in error.

The feedback from family members and carers suggests that ward support volunteers can **positively impact on their overall hospital experience and view of the healthcare provider**, providing **reassurance for the quality of care being received** as well as **benefiting their own emotional wellbeing**.

Impact: Additional family/carer feedback

Family members/carers also were asked to provide their feedback, illustrating the additional value the ward volunteer support role had for them.

Similarly to patients, one family member also **requested a continuation of the service** by staying connected with their loved one post discharge.

"After a bad experience at another hospital, I was anxious, I wanted to know my husband was being looked after. Volunteers have sat with him and kept him company, it put my mind at rest he is not constantly alone."

Family member / Carer

"Volunteers offer a vital support service, especially for those who do not get any visitors. My husband is happy to have volunteer support when I cannot come and visit."

Family member / Carer

"My mum has just been discharged and will miss the volunteers on the ward, chatted and spent time with her whenever they were in, thank you very much for giving up your time to help."

Family member / Carer

"My mum received a great service from the volunteers who visited her, it's a really nice touch and improved her hospital stay. She is a chatty lady, so the volunteers were ideal for her and her socialising needs."

Family member / Carer

*"**My mum wishes she could stay in contact with the ward volunteers once she is discharged, is this possible?** It would be a great discharge service."*

Family member / Carer

"You do not realise the stress relief knowing someone is with my wife when I cannot get there. Thank you."

Family member / Carer

"It is really nice to know my mum is being kept company on the ward, it really does mean a lot to me. Thank you."

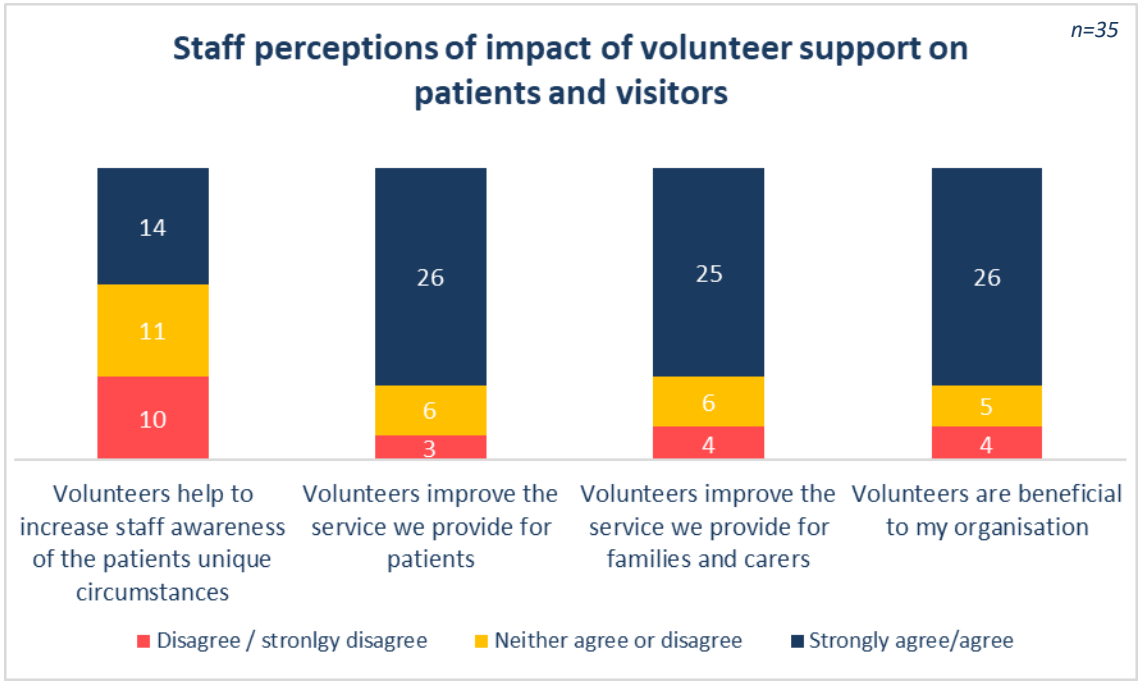
Family member / Carer

Staff experiences

Impact: Staff perceptions

Staff members who worked alongside ward support volunteers were asked to provide their feedback on the volunteering service. The majority of those surveyed were Nursing or Healthcare Assistants (20 of 35 responses) and Registered Nurses / Midwives (12).

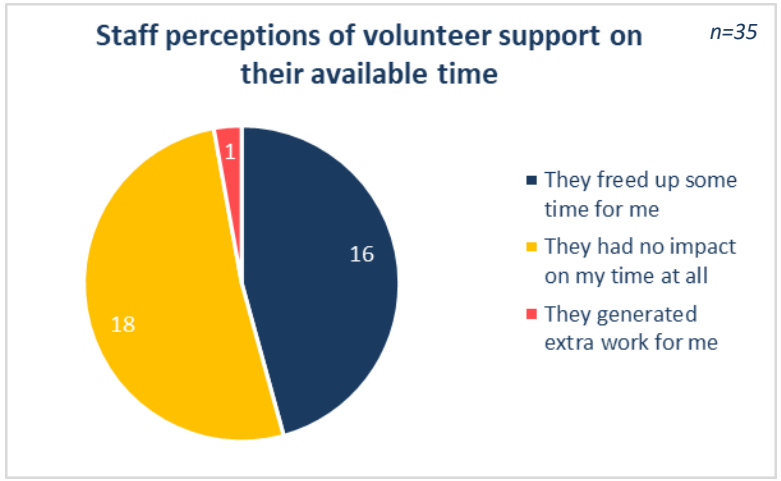
Firstly, staff were asked questions related to the difference these volunteers made to the care / service provided, and more generally to the organisation.

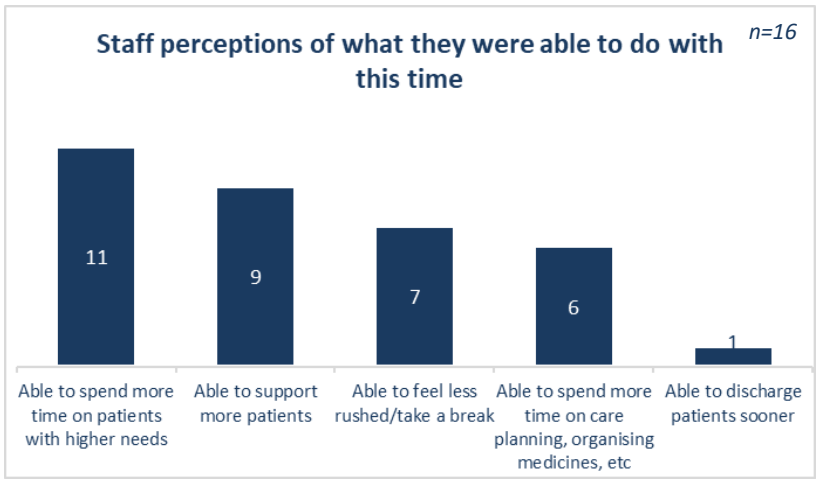


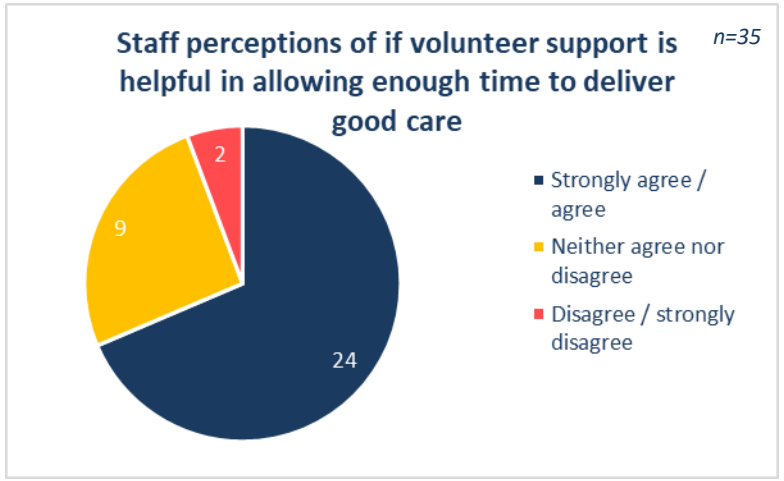
- In relation to the care provided to patients, there were mixed perceptions with the ability of volunteers to increase staff awareness of patient's circumstances. However, almost three quarters of staff agreed or strongly agreed that volunteers helped to improve the overall service provided to patients.
- When asked about the difference volunteers made to families and carers, over two thirds of staff agreed that volunteers had a positive impact.
- Finally, in consideration of the overall organisation, 26 of 35 staff respondents agreed that volunteers were beneficial.
- A proportion of staff were either neutral (neither agree or disagree) or disagreed with each of these statements. Some of these individuals provided additional comment, suggesting some areas for improvement of the volunteer service. For example, a few staff members cited a lack of continuity in volunteers being on the wards, as well as a variation in quality in the support provided by volunteers. *"The volunteers we have on the ward recently, some have been very good, and others do nothing unless asked. They have been on the ward for several months so should be able to find tasks to do… They do not consistently attend on the days they have allocated. The most beneficial visits are from the volunteers who spend time with the patients, chatting, playing games with them."*

Impact: Staff perceptions

Next, staff were asked questions related to the difference volunteers made to their available time.







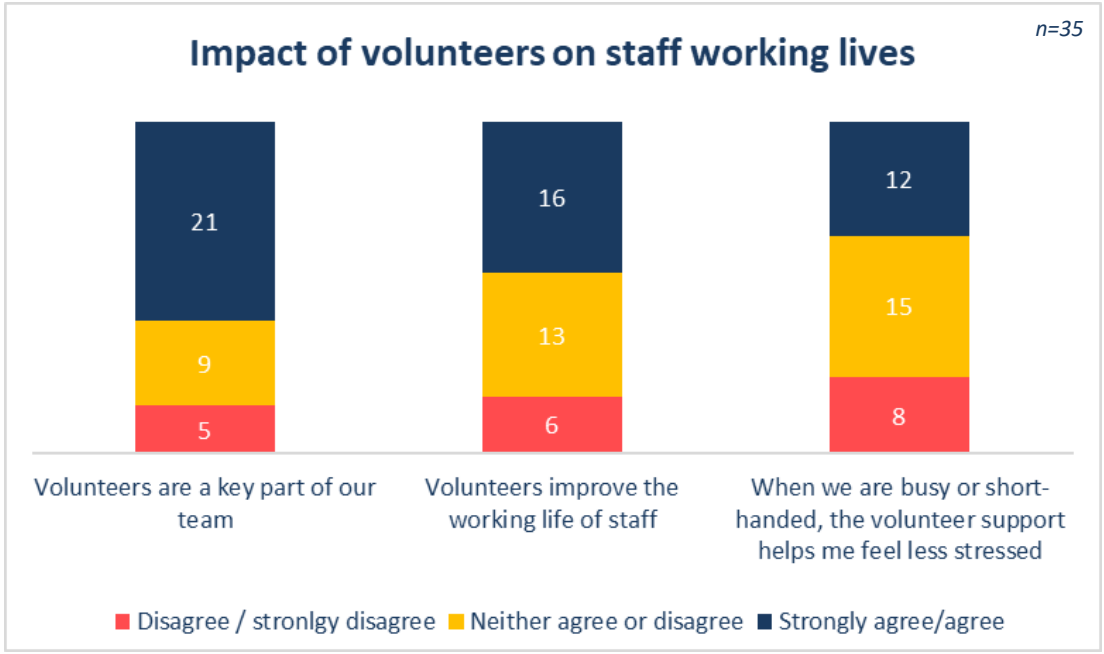
- When asked what impact volunteer support had had on their available time, 16 of 35 staff members agreed they had freed up some time for them. These staff members suggested they were able to use this time to spend more time with patients with higher needs (11 of 16 respondents), to support more patients (9), feel less rushed or take a break (7) and/or spend more time on care planning, organising medicines, etc (6).*
- However, over half of respondents suggested they had no impact on their time. Further, one individual suggested they had generated extra work for them, stating "*little [volunteers] can do to take pressure of nurses e.g. serve drinks, help patients to eat or drink*".
- When asked if volunteer support was helpful in allowing staff time to deliver good care, over two thirds of staff agreed or strongly agreed. For example, one staff respondent described, "*it is lovely to see the volunteers arrive on the ward… the patients enjoy the company, and it does free time up for staff when they are around*."
- Two staff members did disagree with this statement. One of these individuals provided extra insight, explaining *"volunteers in the evening are not engaging with the patients"*.

** Responses to this question were not mutually exclusive – staff respondents were able to select as many responses as were applicable to them.*

Impact: Staff perceptions

Subsequently, staff were asked questions related to the difference volunteers made to them and their working lives.

- Three in every five staff members agreed that volunteers are well embedded into their wards, suggesting they are a key part of their team.
- Less than half of staff respondents agreed that volunteers improve the working lives of staff.
- Additionally, only around a third of staff members agreed that volunteer support helps them to feel less stressed when they are busy.
- For those staff members who did agree with these statements, they reported positive experiences of working alongside the ward support volunteers, reflecting on how much the patients enjoy and appreciate their company. For example, one staff member stated, *"volunteers keep patients company which is great for us as staff, patients are happy to receive volunteer support, volunteers make patients smile".*
- However, the majority of staff disagreed or were neutral in relation volunteers improving their working lives and helping to reduce stress. In addition to the challenges cited on the earlier slides, these staff explained that some volunteers lack confidence to undertake tasks. For example, a respondent reported that some of the younger volunteers *"lack confidence to talk to very elderly [patients, and] stand around and chat to themselves if we don't give them specific jobs*".



Impact: Staff satisfaction

Finally, staff were asked to rate their overall experience of working alongside ward support volunteers.

34 of 35

staff members reported volunteer **support had met or exceeded their expectations**

25 of 35

staff members were **satisfied or very satisfied with the volunteer support** they had received

- All but one staff respondent suggested that the support they received from volunteers had met or exceeded their expectations, with 19 of 35 staff members reporting it their experience had been more positive than expected.
- Almost three quarters of staff also reported they were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall support.

These staff members left positive feedback about their experience of working with ward support volunteers…

"I have been working alongside volunteer for over 12 months now, they are part of our team, we know them and know what tasks they do when volunteering. They are all nice kind people and it's a pleasure to have them on the ward."

Staff member

"All volunteers that I worked alongside with were a great support to our patients in a time where they need someone to talk to and comfort them when our regular staff may not have that time to do so. I saw a big impact that the volunteers made and can't thank them enough for showing great empathy and an understanding to each patient."

Staff member

Findings from analysis of the staff feedback therefore suggests that **different staff members have had quite different experiences of working alongside ward support volunteers**, and consequently have different perceptions in the value they can bring. Within these findings are some potential areas of improvement for the service:

- Consideration should be given to if there are **additional tasks volunteers can support with** to help alleviate some of the pressure on staff.
- Staff would benefit from being better **informed of when they can expect volunteers** to be on the ward, and when they will be leaving, giving better clarity and continuity of support.
- **Volunteers may benefit from some additional support or training** to help them to build confidence to undertake the role and be more proactive in their responsibilities.

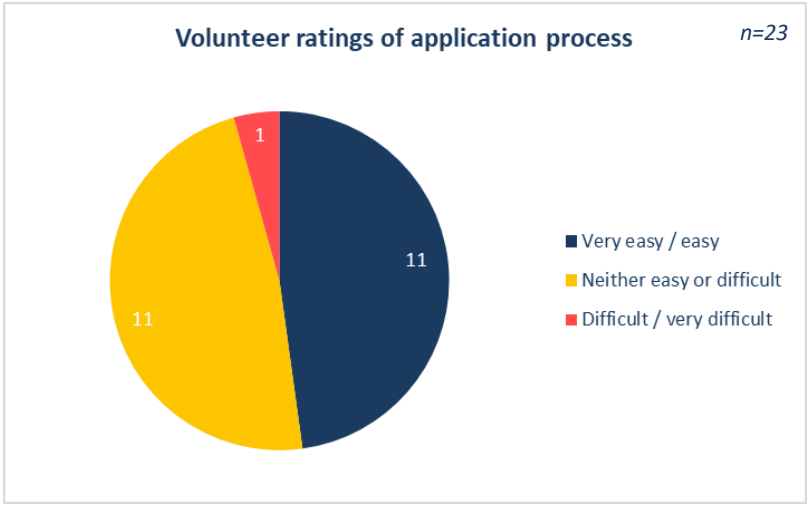
Researchers also recommend further investigation of this feedback, speaking with staff to determine how the volunteer role could be further developed to better meet the needs of the wards.

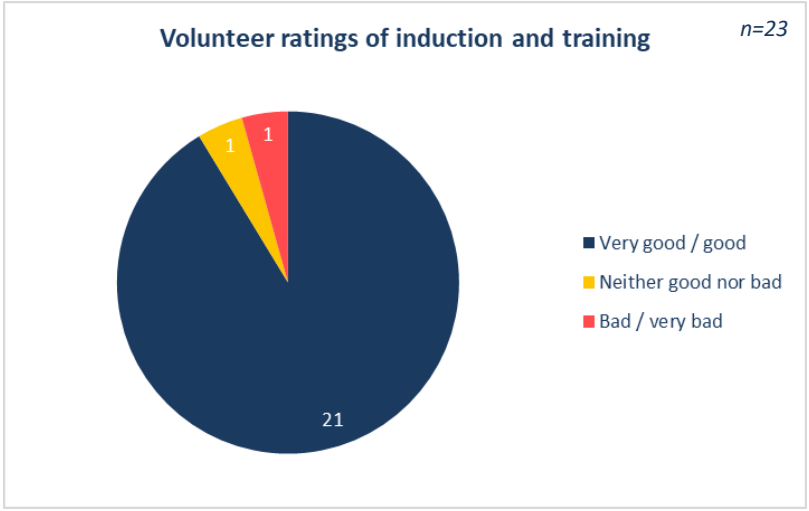
Volunteer experiences

Insight: Volunteer recruitment and onboarding

Volunteers were asked to participate in a survey upon starting in their volunteer role (pre-survey), and then again after they had been volunteering for some time (post-survey). Within the pre-survey, volunteers were asked for feedback on their volunteer recruitment and onboarding experience.

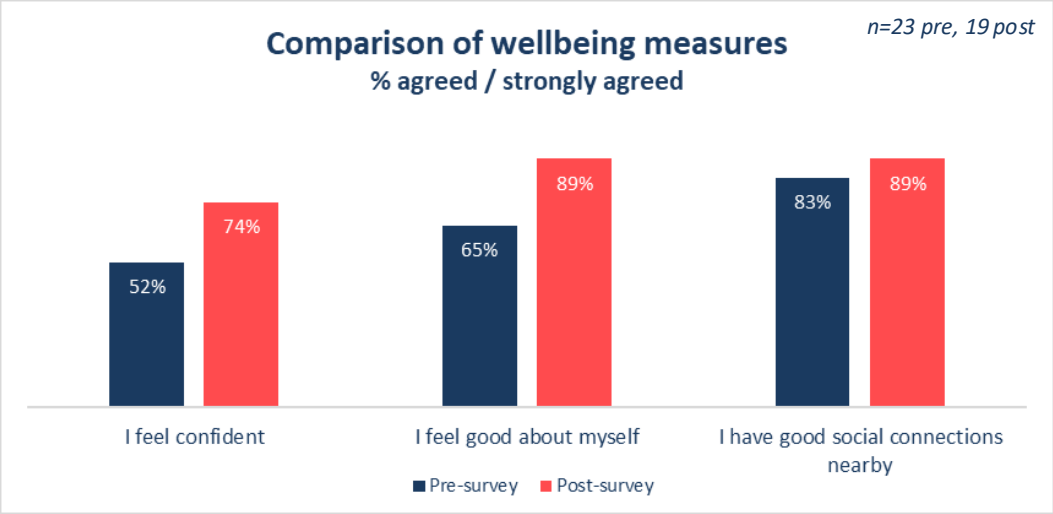
- When asked about the application to become a volunteer, almost half of volunteers reported that the process was easy of very easy. These respondents described a process that was *"easy"* and *"clearly explained"*. They also suggested they had quick and supportive communication from the volunteering team.
- However, the same number of respondents suggested the process was neither easy or difficult. Some of these volunteers explained that the process was *"long but simple".* Others described difficulties with certain elements of the application process, such as providing appropriate documentation. Further, one volunteer suggested that the application process was difficult. This individual stated *"the online quiz was very long".*
- When asked about the induction and training they had received, all but two volunteers expressed that the process was good or very good. These individuals reported that their inductions were *"informative"* and *"well organised"*. They also noted appreciation for the tour of the ward, and that staff were *"friendly and welcoming".*
- One volunteer rated their induction as neither good nor bad but did not provide any further information as to why they felt this way. Additionally, the one respondent who rated their experience as bad suggested that didn't feel prepared to undertake their volunteering role.

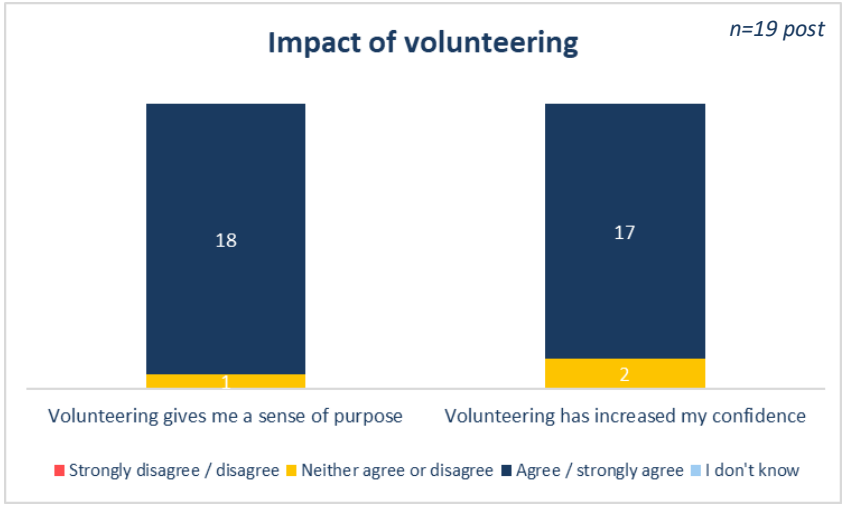




Impact: Volunteer wellbeing outcomes

Volunteers were asked about different social and emotional wellbeing measures in both the pre- and post-survey.





- Improvements were seen in all wellbeing measures - the proportion of volunteers who agreed or strongly agreed that they felt confident and good about themselves both increased following their participation in the ward support role. Additionally, when asked about their social wellbeing, a slightly larger proportion of volunteers also agreed that they had good social connections nearby within the post-survey, however it is worth noting that this measure was already relatively high in the pre-survey.*
- When asked if volunteering had positively impacted upon their sense of purpose, the majority of volunteers agreed or strongly agreed. One volunteer was less certain – they provided some general feedback about their experience of delivering the role, stating *"I feel that it makes a difference to people who are willing to have a chat or play a game, but sometimes I feel like a nuisance to staff when I have to ask a question or have nothing to do so stand at the front desk."*
- 17 of 19 volunteers also agreed that volunteering has increased their confidence. Two volunteers were neutral in relation to this statement, but did not provide any context as to why they felt this way.

These findings therefore suggest that, during their time volunteering, **volunteers experienced improvements in their personal wellbeing.** For the majority, the ward support volunteer role has also resulted in an increased **sense of purpose and confidence.**

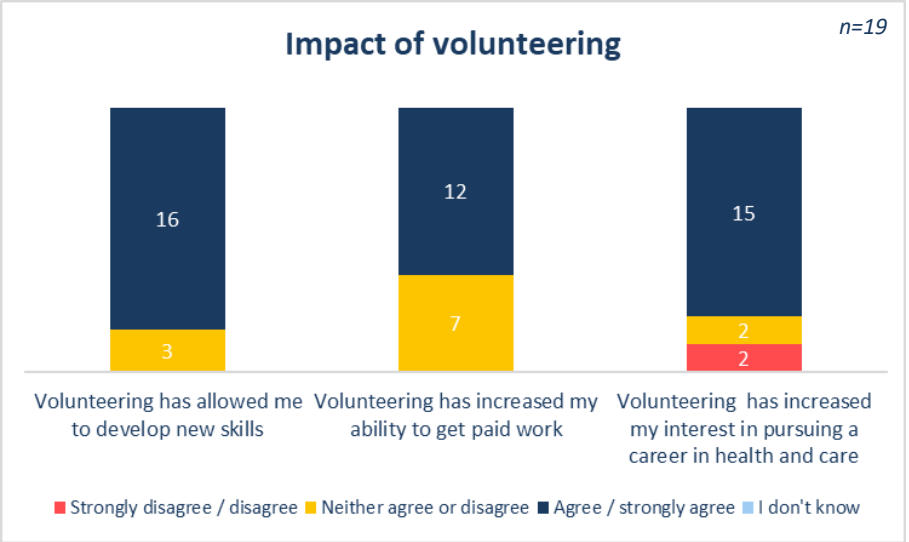
**Please note: While the two datasets are not directly comparable (please see the 'Data limitations' page for more information), they can be used as an indication of changes which may have occurred during their time volunteering.*

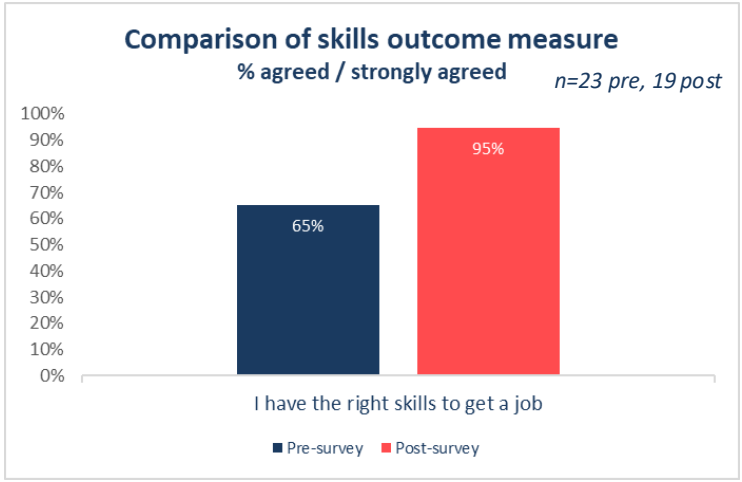
Impact: Volunteer outcomes

Within the post-survey, volunteers were also asked about the difference they felt volunteering had made to them.

- When asked questions related to their skills, employability and future careers, we saw mixed responses from volunteers.
  - 16 of 19 volunteers agreed that volunteering had helped them to develop new skills.
  - Almost two thirds agreed that volunteer has increased their ability to get paid work.
  - Over three quarters agreed volunteers has increased their interest in pursuing a career in health and care.
  - A number of volunteers suggested they were neutral in relation to these statements, with two volunteers disagreeing that volunteering has increased their interest in a health and care career. Unfortunately, these volunteers did not provide any additional information into why they felt this way. However, one volunteer did explain that the experience was *"very enlightening and the staff on the wards were really helpful and nice."*
- Within both the pre- and post- survey, volunteers were asked if they felt they had the right skills to get a job. The proportion of volunteers agreeing or strongly agreeing was 30% higher after they had been a volunteer.

For many, therefore, analysis indicates that the ward support volunteer role has supported the **development of their career prospects,** as well increasing an interest in pursuing a career in health or care.





Impact: Perceptions of role impact

Volunteers were also asked about the difference they felt their role made to the people the patients and staff they support.

"I feel I make a substantial impact by giving patients a chance to be their own person again and not just a patient. The staff have absorbed me into their team, and I offer a listening ear to anyone in need."

Ward support volunteer

"There have been patients who have been looking forward to seeing me. Some patients don't get many visitors, so the presence of volunteers provides an opportunity to socialise and communicate with others."

Ward support volunteer

"Making the patients feel less lonely, giving me an opportunity to help people, just to make life in hospital a bit easier."

Ward support volunteer

"Many patients enjoy having my company, especially the ones who don't get many visitors. I feel volunteers help the hospital ward staff as I am able to complete small jobs to allow staff time to do more important things."

Ward support volunteer

"I feel patients value my company and enjoy seeing me each week. The staff know their patients are being kept company and are happy."

Ward support volunteer

"Provide company to patients and help them talk about how they feel - aids in helping them foster a positive outlook on their recovery and life after hospital. Helps them reminisce about their past which keeps them mentally active and not fall prey to loneliness and depression, especially if they do not get visitors often."

Ward support volunteer

"I feel we can help to take away some of the stress from the hospital staff. We can make being in hospital for a long period of time an easier and more enjoyable experience for the patients and allow them to have conversations like they would at home."

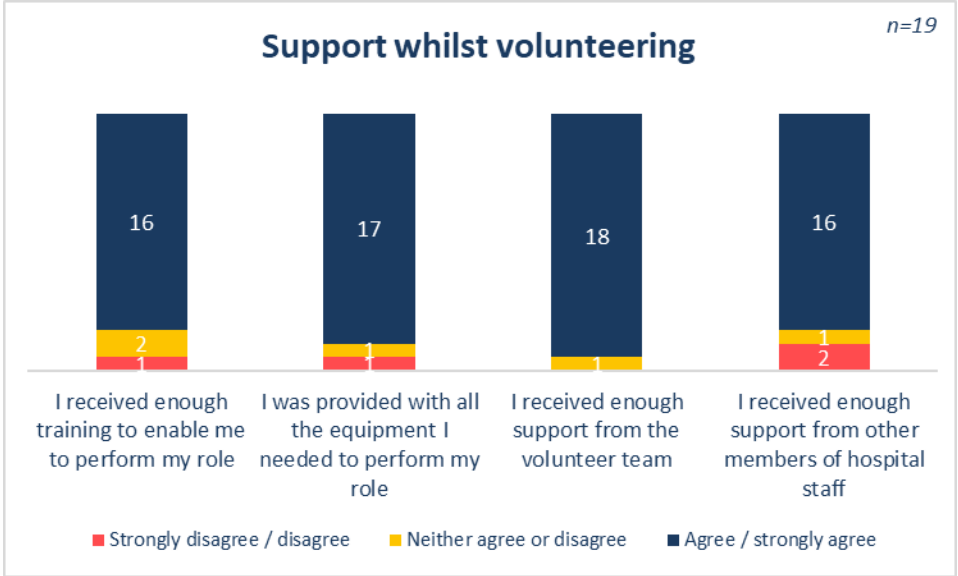
Ward support volunteer

Impact: Volunteer satisfaction

Finally, volunteers were asked about their overall volunteering experience, as well as the support they had received to undertake their role.

- The majority of volunteer respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had enough training to equip them to undertake their role.
- Additionally, 16 of 19 respondents suggested they had the required equipment to undertake their role. A small number of volunteers disagreed or were neutral in response to this statement, however, they did not provide any further information as to why they felt this way.
- When asked if they felt well supported by the volunteer and staff teams, the overwhelming majority agreed. Two volunteers did disagree that they had received enough from the wider hospital staff team, but again, unfortunately did not provide any further details.
- 16 of 19 volunteers reported that the volunteering role had met or exceeded their expectations, with seven reporting their expectations had been exceeded. Three volunteers reported that the volunteering role did not meet their expectations. Of these respondents, two left overarchingly positive comments. The other, as previously reported, left general feedback about the role stating that they sometimes *"feel like a nuisance to staff"*.
- Over two thirds of volunteers reported they were satisfied or very satisfied with their volunteering experience. Three volunteers were neutral; however, two individuals did suggest that they were very unsatisfied with their experience. These respondents provided overarchingly positive responses to the other survey questions and suggested the role had exceeded their expectations, so it is possible this was selected in error.

For the majority of volunteers, it therefore appears that they had a **positive, well supported volunteering experience**. However, analysis of volunteer feedback does suggest that there are some areas of improvement, with a proportion of neutral or negative responses. **Researchers recommend further investigation into this feedback to determine what service developments could be made**.



16 of 19

volunteers reported the role had **met or exceeded their expectations**

13 of 19

volunteers were **satisfied / very satisfied with their volunteering experience**

Volunteer case studies

"Hello, my name is Norma, I am 77 years old and live in Ilkeston. My hobbies are crafts, singing in a choir, gardening, and volunteering at DCHS and the local museum. My role is ward support volunteer at Ilkeston Community Hospital and I have been volunteering for five years. I volunteer twice a week and I attend the ward at afternoon visiting time. I sit with patients who do not get any visitors and I like to think that I am their visitor for the day. I play games with patients; we do crafts and have a chat. I became a volunteer because I live on my own, I have had a really nice life and it's my way of giving something back. I love listening to patients' life experiences and sharing stories.

I don't see them as patients, I see them as a person. I feel the patients see me as a friendly neighbour. I sit and listen and help with any problems they may have. When they say they have had a lovely afternoon with me, it makes me feel ten feet tall.

I find volunteering on the ward very rewarding and I get so much out of it, a feeling of happiness that I have helped someone and a sense of being needed. I help the staff by relieving them so they can do the clinical side of things and I have got the time to listen and life experience to be able to reminisce with them.

I feel part of the ward team which is also important. All the staff respect my volunteer role. I always remember a lady who wasn't local, she had never heard of Ilkeston, she was very upset and anxious about coming here, she said after being on the ward and having me sit with her each afternoon she felt as if a big pair of arms were hugging her and felt happy and safe. She loved a game of cards and did not have any visitors. She was on the ward for six-eight weeks, and I visited her twice a week. I feel volunteering is important because it adds to the patients care and helps with the emotional side of their recovery."

Norma Brown – DCHS Ward Support Volunteer

Volunteer case studies

Hello, my name is Matthew. I absolutely love volunteering and I love football. I support Derby County and Ilkeston Town football clubs. I am a disabled, wheelchair user and I play wheelchair football in my spare time. I manage Ilkeston Town under 18's football team and I'm a steward at Ilkeston Town on match days.

I am a meet and greet volunteer at the entrance of Ilkeston Community Hospital and also a ward support volunteer on the inpatient ward. I became a volunteer to help people within my community, meet new people and keep myself busy. I love every minute when I volunteer, love meeting new people, having a chat and making friends. I am very calm and very good at listening.

I cheer patients up on the ward, one patient on the ward said that I make his day and he looks forward to a Tuesday. Another patient also wrote in to express how calm and collected I was in arranging her hospital transport.

Volunteering is important because it helps my mental health, as well as the patients. It makes me happy and I get lots of enjoyment from it. I'm thankful for the volunteering opportunity as it has given me the NHS experience I need to hopefully get a paid job in the NHS. I feel I have become more confident since volunteering and it has boosted my self-esteem.

Matthew Frost – DCHS Ward Support Volunteer

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions and recommendations

- The ward support volunteer role appears to hold many benefits for patients and family members/carers. Feedback from patients suggests the volunteer support has resulted in **improved mood, reduced loneliness**, and an **improved hospital experience**. For hospital visitors, all respondents agreed that volunteers **reduced their own anxiety**, as well as **improving the confidence in the quality of care being provided to their loved one**. Some patient and family respondents suggested that they would appreciate the opportunity for the **volunteers' support to continue after they had left the hospital, providing a post-discharge support service.**
- Whilst appreciative of the support and value that the role can bring to patients**, staff members appeared to have mixed views about the value of the role to them and their working lives**. Analysis suggests that, whilst the majority were satisfied with the support volunteers provided, that there are some opportunities for improvement. Researchers recommend further investigation into this feedback, particularly considering:
    - If there are **additional tasks volunteers can support with to help** alleviate some of the pressure on staff;
    - If staff could be provided with **more information about when they can expect volunteers to be on the ward, and when they will be leaving**.
    - If **volunteers may benefit from some additional support or training** to help them to build confidence to undertake the role and be more proactive in their responsibilities.
- If, following this further investigation, no particular tasks or improvements are identified by staff, it may be worth discussing whether impact on staff should be a key outcome for this role. As it is currently being delivered, the role holds many positive benefits for patients and their loved ones, but less so for staff. Therefore, **reframing the role as being added value for patients and family members, rather than to improve staff efficiency or wellbeing, may be appropriate.**
- Volunteers report feeling **well supported in undertaking their role** and their experience appears to have **resulted in several positive benefits to their emotional wellbeing, social wellbeing, and the development of skills**. However, with some volunteers responding neutrally or negatively to the survey questions, this does suggest potential opportunities for service improvement. Further, one volunteer noted that they sometimes feel superfluous to the needs of patients/the ward, and one other suggested they may have benefited from additional training to help them in feeling prepared to undertake the role. Again, **researchers suggest further investigation into this feedback may be advantageous**, however addressing the recommendations highlighted by staff may also help in attending to these volunteer's concerns.
- Overarchingly, this evaluation highlights that the ward support volunteer role appears to have **been successful in achieving its main aim of improving patient and their loved one's experience** by providing support and companionship to individuals during their hospital stay, illustrating the positive impact that volunteering can have within a health and care setting.

Acknowledgements

Helpforce would like to pass on our thanks to the volunteering team at Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust, with particular thanks to Michelle Fisher, Patient Involvement and Volunteering Officer, and Deborah Hall, Head of Patient and Experience and Involvement. We also like to pass on our thanks to the participating patients, family members/carers, staff and volunteers for providing their insights and feedback - without them, this evaluation would not have been possible.

Data limitations

- The results from the volunteer pre- and post-surveys are not directly comparable. To maintain confidentiality, respondents were not asked to provide identifying information. However, this means that it is unknown whether the respondents completing the post-survey had all completed a pre-survey. There was also a smaller number of respondents who completed the post-survey, so it is known that not everyone who completed a pre-survey also completed a post-survey.
- In the project extension phase, volunteer reference numbers were introduced to allow for matched group data analysis, in the hopes of responding to the point above. However, reference numbers were not consistently provided/recorded and therefore did not cover the entire volunteer cohort, making it impossible to assess the comparability of the groups. Furthermore, due to the low sample size, it was not possible for the matched group data to be utilised in any data analysis.
- The majority of volunteer post-survey responses were from Ilkeston (7) and Ripley (6) Hospitals, with fewer responses from Ashbourne Hospital (3), Clay Cross Hospital (2), and Matlock Hospital (1). This uneven response rate suggests that the volunteer feedback may not fully capture the experiences of all participating hospitals. Further, low responses rates did not allow for comparison of volunteer experiences across the different hospitals.
- Staff did not provide information as to which hospital they worked at, therefore our understanding of staff engagement and the project's impact across different locations is limited. Since the project was active in multiple organisations, it is possible that not all staff members had the same opportunity to work closely with volunteers, which could lead to varying levels of perceived impact.

Appendix A: About the Helpforce Insight and Impact Service

What is it?

- The I&I Service is an online tool to help you easily and effectively evaluate your voluntary project or initiative.
- It guides you on a simple 4-step process, from designing outcomes for your beneficiaries through to what data we will need to collect - how, when, and from whom.
- Resulting in an evaluation report that our team produces for you, showing evidence of impact made against the outcomes and insights around how the project is working.

How the service is making a difference

We have worked with many NHS and VCS organisations over the last 3 years to collect data on over 100 high-impact voluntary projects. We have produced evidenced findings against a broad range health and care outcome measures, that have helped to scale up volunteering services and unlock additional funding for our partners.

A guide to some key terms we use

Insights provide an understanding of a situation or problem. They help us to share valuable information around what is working well, and what is not working so well, so that we can advise on potential service improvements and developments.

Impact relates to evidence of lasting and sustainable changes. Impact data helps us to understand the value and difference being made as a result of the project.

Evidence is reviewed against the following criteria to determine if it is compelling, promising, or limited:

- Is the sample size / response rate reliable and robust?
- Is the data direct or a proxy measure?
- Is there a causal link between the evidence and the outcome?
- Is there a control group or comparative data set?
- How was the evidence gathered – directly from participants, or via a third party?
- Was the survey question well designed, or has there been signs of misunderstanding by participants?

helpforce

Thank you

help@helpforce.community
www.helpforce.community

© Helpforce, 2024.