



Volunteer to Career Programme

Findings report

East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust

[May 2024]



a Helpforce programme
Volunteer to Career

funded by NHS England

in partnership with
helpforce

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Our VtC Career Pathway

- 1. Volunteer induction and resource pack:** Provide an initial meet and greet forum; receive a welcome resource pack with information about the role, organisation and pathways available to them. This was completed on the one day upskill. It's also an opportunity for new volunteers to meet their peers, hear from clinicians and ask questions and we set up a What's app group.
- 2. Initial career goals discussion/interview:** The career conversation is important to have early on with the volunteer to establish their career ambitions. Working with the clinical lead, the volunteer will identify their career goals and agree on the steps needed to support them to achieve them through the VtC pathway.
- 3. Impactful volunteer roles:** The volunteer role is mapped to local recruitment needs. The volunteer is supported to develop the required skills, experience and exposure. The CFR role already exist but the extended skills gained through VtC could support future patients.
- 4. Mentoring and ongoing career support:** Ongoing opportunity for volunteers to receive a mix of information and more structured career-based conversations with relevant identified mentors and the VtC clinical lead.
- 5. Work experiences through volunteering:** CFRs get to spend 12 hours volunteering in the Emergency operations centre and 6x12 hour shifts in an operational environment. Support and mentoring are available from Healthcare professionals. There is also a volunteering diary to complete.
- 6. Employability support:** Provision of employment skills such as interview techniques and CV writing will be offered to volunteers through HR and/or clinical lead. There is an opportunity to complete functional skills where required.
- 7. Securing employment or education:** CFRs are supported with application and interview. They are guaranteed an interview, but there are no shortcuts when filling out the application.



Programme overview

The **Helpforce Volunteer to Career (VtC) programme** is designed to support volunteers to take up a career in health and care. Helpforce has worked alongside health and care organisations to set up and implement volunteering projects which incorporate career pathways for volunteers. They have worked in partnership with organisations, such as ours, to implement the Volunteer to Career Pathway and to provide support in evaluating its impact. The VtC programme has been designed to support **organisational** improvement across **three key strategic components, identified as essential to achieving systemic change**:

- **Clinical/health and care leadership** - Developing a network of senior clinical/health and care leaders to harness their expertise to positively influence wider effective engagement, and ultimately adoption of, VtC projects.
- **Environment and culture** - utilise best practices to raise the value of the volunteer workforce in the health and care environment to enhance the likelihood of volunteers wanting to adopt a career in health and care.
- **Volunteer to Career Pathways** - Develop innovative and impactful volunteer roles and career pathways, linked to local recruitment needs, to encourage and enable volunteers to use this as a route to a career in the NHS.

East of England Ambulance Service programme overview and objectives :

- **The volunteering role(s) VtC volunteers undertook and what this involved**, was an existing role the Community First Responder (CFR) Role. From here volunteers spend time with clinicians in the organisation. VtCs undertook their FREC4 and in some instance C1 and CERAD.
- **An overview of the VtC programme**. The VtC programme enables volunteers to explore their career interests, while simultaneously providing them with an opportunity to gain experience of volunteering within a Pre-Hospital environment. Volunteers are provided with experience of working alongside existing staff like ECA as they are supported to understand those roles. They will be made aware of career opportunities within our organisation and supported to undertake extensive training delivered by our volunteer training team and the volunteer to career clinical lead.
- **Benefits anticipated the programme would have for the organisation**. The VtC programme was also designed to result in several positive benefits for our organisation. Alongside building a skilled volunteer workforce who can provide support to our patients, it aims to build a skilled potential workforce for our organisation and/or the wider health and care sector. Building relationships with volunteers and creating a more inclusive organisation.

Our VtC programme objectives

The VtC programme began in May 2023, and the initial programme ran until April 2024. With programme management and evaluation support provided by [Helpforce](#), we implemented and delivered our VtC programme to achieve these programme objectives.

1. **Deliver a sustainable VtC Pathway** that is ready to scale to address wider workforce needs by the end of the project. Success measures included: an increase in positive volunteering culture, clinical sponsorship of volunteering programmes for 2024, community integration and partnerships, integration of volunteering within strategic and operational priorities, and volunteer to career pathways. All of these measures will be assessed via the VtC self assessment tools (more details on this are provided within the evaluation approach slide). The objective was to further deliver FREC4 and provide opportunity for employment for those that wanted to continue into EEAST as an ECA. The measure was through case studies of individuals.
2. **Advertise** 3 adverts were placed, 1 for the Volunteers to undertake the pathway and 1 for the mentors that would be required to support them. A further one was made for the military, but unfortunately we were not able to get anyone on the program.
3. **Steering group in place** – we were unable to do this and whilst I wouldn't recommend this, it allowed me a certain freedom to complete the project. Success for VtC was giving the volunteers the FREC4 to help them later apply for a role. This was further enhanced by application and interview support.
4. Identify and **establish key relationships/partnerships** to support the delivery of the project, including Community Response, People Service and the TrainEEAST as well as and external connections like others running their project and Helpforce. Success measures included: community organisations established as a source for recruiting volunteers to the pathway, provision of training and employment support by internal colleagues.
5. **Organisational agreement to sustain** the VtC pathway following the completion of the initial delivery period, with ambitions to scale the programme to support wider workforce needs. Success measures included: VtC built into workforce strategy and people planning – still working on this, funding secured for resource to support the pathway after the initial delivery period – board paper waiting for approval. VtC pathway processes embedded into business as usual – pending as part of the board paper

Helpforce's evaluation approach

Using its established [*Insight and Impact*](#) evaluation service, Helpforce follows a consistent methodology to determine the impact of volunteering roles on health outcomes. Target outcomes are identified across a range of beneficiaries representing the people and organisations involved, and then the necessary data is collected to prove and evidence the outcomes.

The evaluation sought to answer three key questions.

- What was the impact of the VtC programme on:
 - Corporate behaviours towards volunteering?
 - Enabling individual volunteers to progress towards a career in health and care?
 - The attitudes of front-line staff towards volunteer services?

The outcomes the evaluation aimed to measure included...



Note: The analysis in this report is provided by the Helpforce Insight and Impact team, and the contextual information has been provided by Vikki Darby Volunteer to Career.

Evaluation approach: methodology

Within the VtC programme, Helpforce utilises three data collection methods:

- A **'VtC Self-Assessment Tool'** (referred to as SAT) was completed by the project's clinical/health and care lead at the start and then again near the end of the project. The tool measures the organisation against a series of identified categories and questions associated with their volunteering strategy. Also, as part of the SAT, volunteers and staff are invited to complete some additional feedback surveys to provide insight into their perceptions of organisational change.
- **Volunteer surveys** were designed to capture data around the volunteers' level of interest in a health/care career, how they are finding their volunteer role and the VtC programme. The surveys were completed twice, both at the beginning of their volunteering and at a later period (referred to as 'start' and 'latest').
- **Staff surveys** were completed at the start and near the end of the VtC project (referred to as pre and post surveys).

During the course of the VtC programme the following surveys were completed:

8

volunteer pre-surveys
were submitted

8

volunteer post-surveys
were submitted

20

staff pre-surveys were
submitted

15

staff post-surveys were
submitted

Volunteering activity

Across the duration of the initial delivery period, there was a great deal of volunteering activity within our organisation:

10

volunteers were recruited

1,148

Patient hours were supported
by VtC volunteers

VtC volunteers supported patients within the 12-month initial delivery period. This support was delivered by 10 volunteers undertaking their CFR volunteering role , delivering 1,148 hours of volunteering support.

Staff and patient support tasks included:

- Volunteers responded to patients via 999 calls as well as completing 6 x 2 hour ride outs and 2 x 6 hour shifts in EOC

Evaluation findings: volunteers

8 volunteers completed the pathway out of 10 volunteers recruited.

Through the VtC programme and the career support provided, volunteers applied for jobs and attended interviews. These applications resulted in **4 volunteers securing employment**, into roles such as ECA roles.

4

volunteers have taken up
employment in the NHS

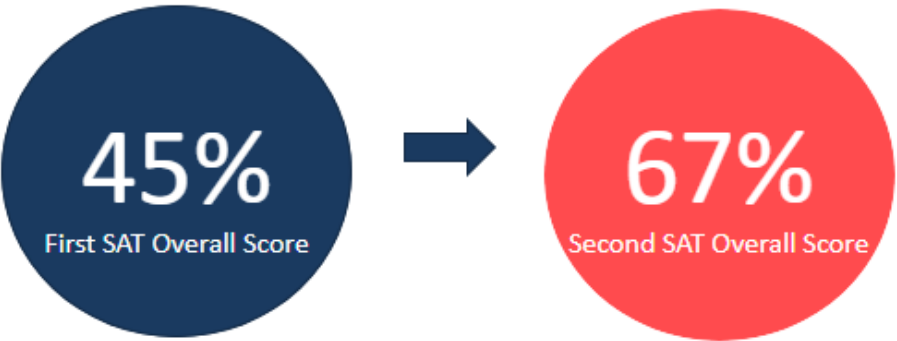
50%

of volunteers who completed
the VtC pathway secured
employment

A volunteer provided some additional insights into their experience of being a VtC volunteer...

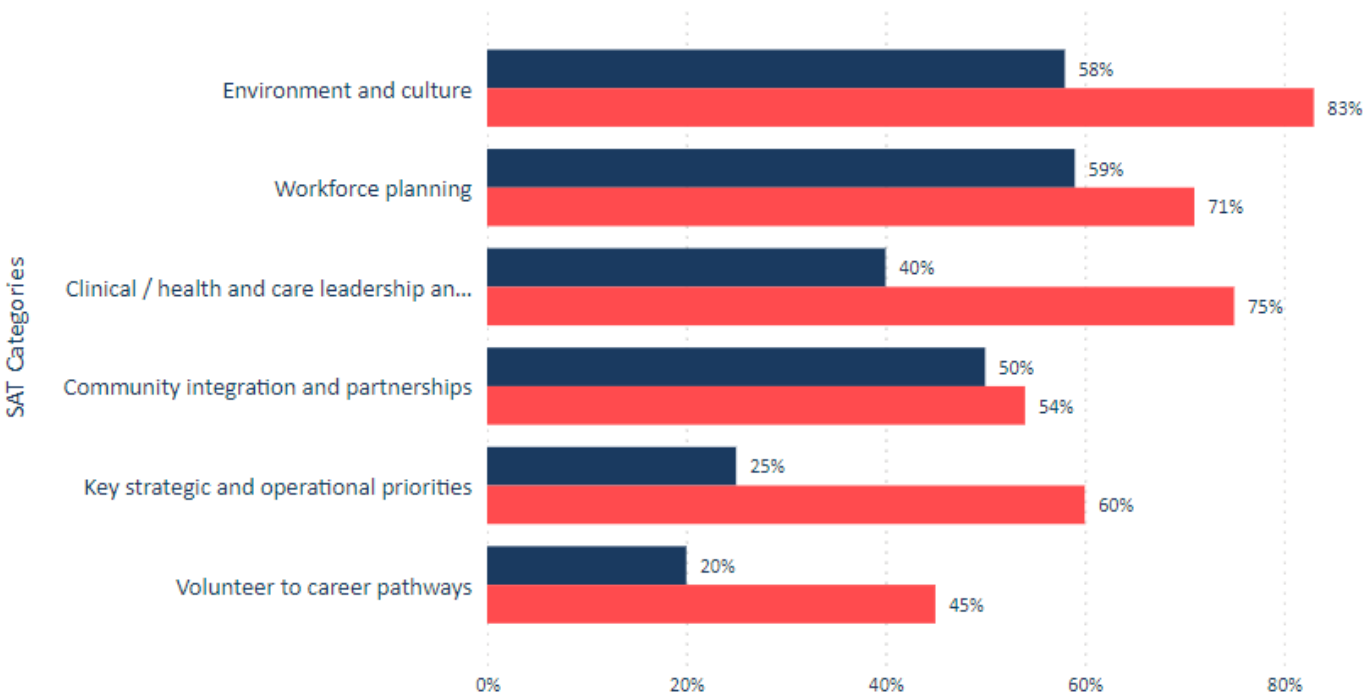
“The whole journey has been amazing, the staff helping to run the course couldn’t have been more helpful. Vikki has been especially amazing!!”

Evaluation findings: organisation



First and Second Average SAT Scores Overview

Submission ● First ● Last



After completing the VtC programme, there was an **increase in the overall SAT score, which improved from 45% to 67%.**

Similar to the positive change in the overall SAT score result, **we have observed an improvement in the scores for the six individual elements of organisational improvement for volunteering.**

The scores reflect the volunteers being in the Origination in EOC and in Frontline Operations. This has helped to increase the awareness of the project.

Comms within the Trust has also been instrumental in telling the stories of the program and more importantly of the volunteers themselves.

Staff support for this project has reached far and wide through the organisation which I believe has further fueled the impact.

The differing stakeholders that have been involved have supported the awareness of the program.

Evaluation findings – Volunteers

After the VtC programme, the proportion of volunteers who **knew definitely what they wanted to do with their working lives increased from 88% to 100%, meaning that 100% of volunteers maintained or increased their certainty** in their ambitions through the VtC programme.

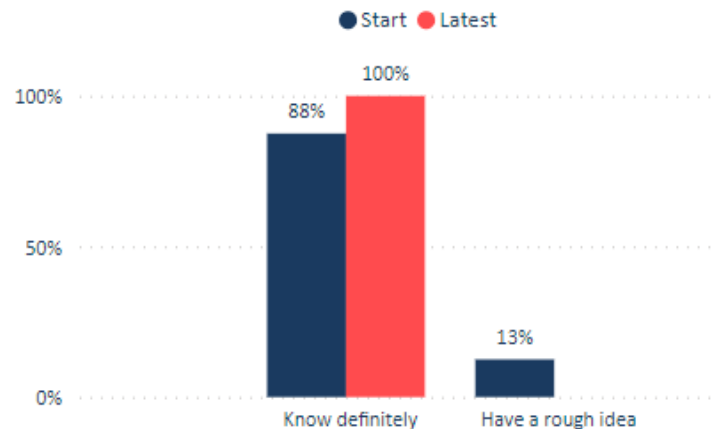
The proportion of volunteers who had **perfect certainty in their career ambitions decreased by 13%** by the end of the programme (13% to 0%). However, 87% of volunteers maintained or increased their confidence in achieving these ambitions through the VtC programme.

After the VtC programme, the proportion of volunteers who were **very interested in an NHS or social care career decreased from 100% to 88%. 88% of volunteers maintained their interest** in this career pathway as a result of participating in the VtC programme.

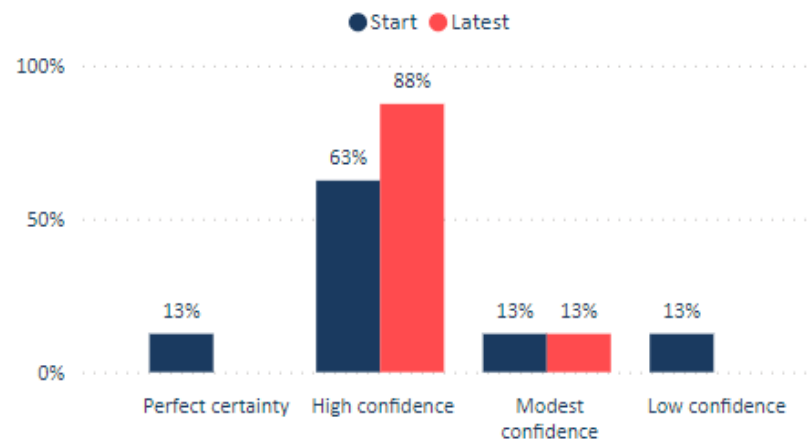
Part of VtC in EEASt is to provide staff a unique opportunity for a job that many find challenging. This pathway gives volunteers an opportunity to try before you buy as it were, and this may be reflected in the reduction of interest. We also had some difficulty around recruitment, it was a little clumsy and this may have had an impact. On the whole volunteers were keen to explore this as a career.

N= 8 pre- and post-surveys

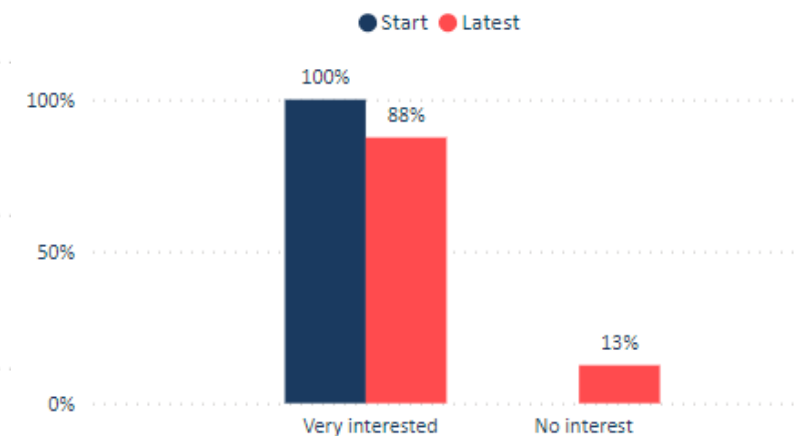
Ambitions for working life over the next 5 years



Confidence in career ambitions



Level of interest in NHS or social care career



Evaluation findings – Volunteers

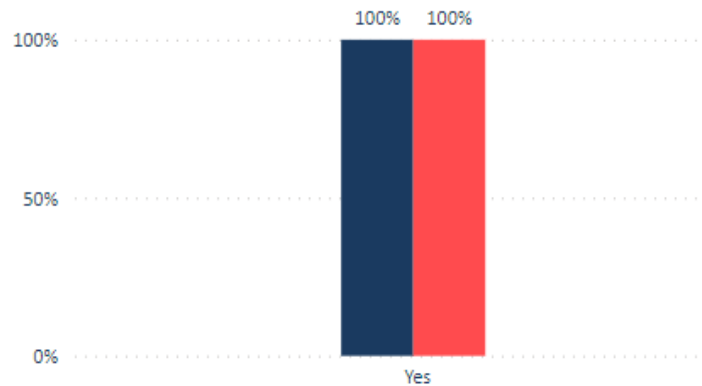
Volunteers were also asked about their hopes and if they wished their volunteering role would result in certain outcomes related to their careers, future education, and training. At the end of the programme:

- **8 volunteers** hoped their volunteering role would lead to employment with our organisation.
- **4 volunteers** hoped their volunteering role would lead to employment in a similar health or care organisation.
- **8 volunteers** hoped their volunteering role would lead to further education aligned to their career goals.

N= 8 pre- and post-surveys

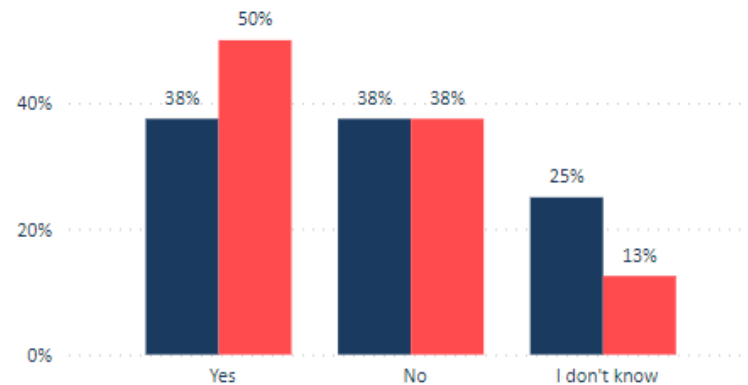
Hopes to work in this organisation

Submission ● Start ● Latest



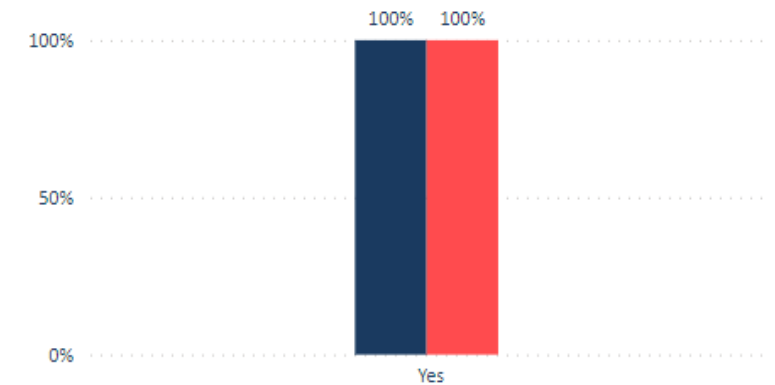
Hopes to work in a similar organisation

Submission ● Start ● Latest



Hopes to secure further education

Submission ● Start ● Latest



Throughout the programme there has been optimism and certainty amongst the volunteers that they wish to work at EEAST or similar and that they want to secure further education. A positive change has remained evident as a higher or similar proportion of individuals respond 'Yes' in follow-up survey, indicating their VtC experience has maintained or increased their employment or education aspirations.

Evaluation findings – Volunteer case study

Matt Sharp's Story

At 33, Matt Sharp, a Community First Responder (CFR) volunteer with East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust (EEAST), **has successfully secured a role as a qualified Emergency Care Assistant (ECA)**. Matt's ambition is to become a fully qualified paramedic and credits the Helpforce Volunteer to Career programme as being a primary driver behind his success so far.

From roofing to volunteering as a CFR...

"Doing the first aid course planted a seed in my head. It made me want to become a paramedic and join the ambulance service. At first, I didn't know where to start. So, I broke away from being a roofer and got a job as a care assistant. Caring is very different to working on roofs! I did personal care which included things like cooking lunches and helping people move about. It was when I started volunteering at EEAST as a CFR that I felt like I was heading in the right direction."

How did Matt become involved with Volunteer to Career?

"During my CFR training, I made it clear to Vikki that I wanted to join the trust. She was really supportive and told me to 'bear with us, as there may be something coming up in the pipeline.' She then told me about the Helpforce Volunteer to Career programme the trust were piloting. I was a bit hesitant at first because it involved classroom-based learning. I'm not very academic and didn't get great GCSE results, but because I'd set my mind on working for the trust, I went for it and with the help of Suffolk college, got ready for the exams that I needed to qualify for a paid position."

Volunteer to Career has provided Matt and other volunteers at EEAST the opportunity to join the ambulance service and enabled the trust to provide encouragement to people who might not otherwise have considered it as a career.

"I like being able to support ambulance crews and knowing I make a difference in my local community. Volunteering has really boosted my confidence and communication skills. The Volunteer to Career programme has made my pathway into the ambulance trust a lot easier thanks to the help and guidance from people I never would have met otherwise! The training has made things a lot clearer to me on why paramedics do what they do."

"I'd recommend volunteering and Volunteer to Career to anyone. It is a great way of getting involved and really helps in supporting your job applications."

Matt begins his new job as a qualified Emergency Care Assistant (ECA) with EEAST in April 2024.



Evaluation findings – Volunteer case study



How did you hear about the Volunteer to Career scheme?

"From the trainer on Afros course."

What were you doing previously to this?

"Stay at home mum."

What made you want to join the scheme at EEAST?

"I wanted to work for the Ambulance service for years."

Can you briefly take us through your journey in this scheme please?

"I was a volunteer 5 years ago, with the intention of working for the Ambulance service. I had no idea which qualification I needed. I had gone down the wrong path getting qualifications that I didn't need putting financial pressure on myself. Rejoining the CFR group in 2023 and going on this amazing opportunity helped me. Now I got my Frec 4. Hopefully I will have my English functional skills (as my GCSE English from Hungary doesn't count) and hopefully I will have my C1 license as well.. so I can start working for East of England Ambulance Service as soon as I am ready."

What was shadowing our staff like?

"Amazing."

What have you learnt over the last few months?

"I learnt to stay calm on a call."

What are your plans for the future?

"Working for the ambulance service in 2-3 years."

Is there any advice you would give to others like yourself, or those wanting to join us at EEAST?

"Go for it! It will make your journey easier."

Aniko Hajer – VtC volunteers

Evaluation findings – Volunteer case study

How did you hear about the Volunteer to Career scheme?

"I went to an EEAST recruitment day in Chelmsford."

What were you doing previously to this?

"Primary school teacher."

What made you want to join the scheme at EEAST?

"I was looking to work in an ambulance and needed to start somewhere."

Can you briefly take us through your journey in this scheme please?

"Did FREC 3 course in February 2023 (self-funded) then went to a recruitment day, then did CFR evolve courses over the Easter holiday 2023 and got accepted onto the Volunteer to Career program. I applied for a ECA job in July and started that in September but in the meantime completed the FREC 4 course in August/early September 2023. My ECA training was in Welwyn Garden City mid-September 2023."

What was shadowing our staff like?

"Really, really interesting. Helpful to understand what goes on in Control Centres as I work on the road in an ambulance. They were kind and informative."

What have you learnt over the last few months?

"So much medical knowledge and lots about myself too, like my tenacity."

What are your plans for the future?

"I'd like to be an Emergency Ambulance Technician."

Is there any advice you would give to others like yourself, or those wanting to join us at EEAST?

"Go for it, you can do more than you think you can!"

"Thank you for all your hard work in making this possible and for helping me along the way in this new career."

VtC volunteer

Evaluation findings – Volunteer case study



How did you hear about the Volunteer to Career scheme?

"The scheme was mentioned by the trainers during my AFROS training."

What were you doing previously to this?

"Semi-retired."

What made you want to join the scheme at EEAST?

"I'd not appreciated how much I would enjoy volunteering as a CFR, especially on the Ipswich CFR car which is much busier than my local, rural community."

What was shadowing our staff like?

"I have completed two third-manning shifts to date and a shift at EOC. I have also been backed-up by EEAST crews at over 100 jobs as a CFR in Ipswich over the last 10 months. Overwhelmingly the staff have been extremely engaging, appreciative and willing to share their experience and knowledge."

Was there a part of the journey you were fond of/ enjoyed the most?

"The third-manning shifts have been fantastic. No only to get a feel for the ECA role but also to see first hand the teamwork and problem solving required in emergency care."

What are your plans for the future?

"I hope to have the opportunity to apply for an ECA position with EEAST in the next two months."

Is there any advice you would give to others like yourself, or those wanting to join us at EEAST?

"Whilst I am still a volunteer and have yet to apply for an ECA position at EEAST, the advice, training and support through the VtC scheme has been fantastic. Whilst there is a significant time commitment, the outcomes so far in terms of increased knowledge and confidence as an emergency responder have made that completely worthwhile. Of course there are the certificates gained through the process too. It has been a wonderful opportunity."

"A special thank you to Vikki Darby for her leadership in championing this scheme. It has enabled me and many others to have a great opportunity for self-development and, potentially, employment at EEAST."

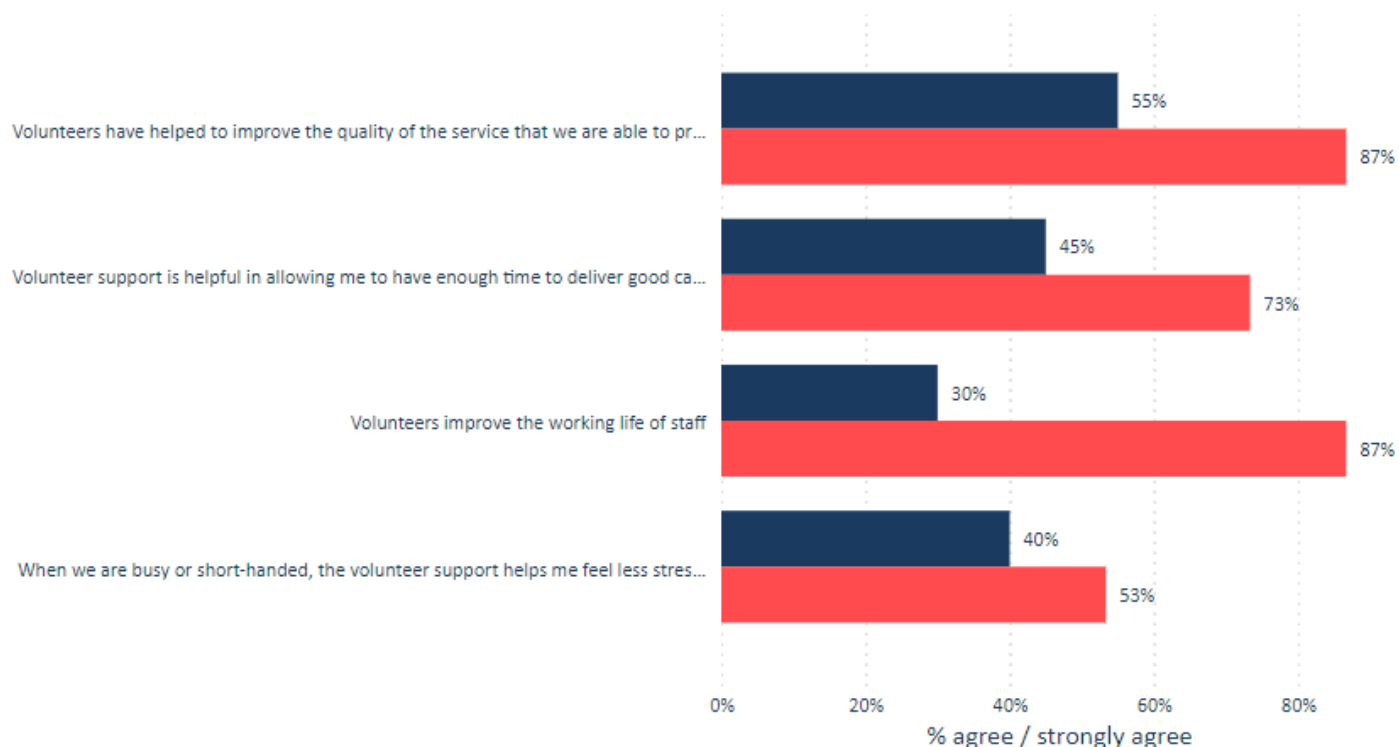
Christopher Lye – VtC volunteer

Evaluation findings: staff

The VtC programme illustrated an improvement in staff perceptions of the impact volunteers can have for them and their organisation.

Staff perceptions on the VtC volunteers

Submission ● Pre ● Post



N=20 pre- and 15 post-surveys

Our CFRs spent time in the organisation to see which role would suit them and the career path they wanted to choose. The increase in staff who agree after the programme, suggests a positive impact on staff perceptions about volunteers and volunteering as a result of the programme.

A staff member reflected upon the difference VtC volunteers had made to patients and staff...

"I think volunteers are a fantastic asset to our ambulance service and by giving them the training we have it allows them to follow their dream role which they may never have had the opportunity to do. The volunteers I have had contact with have been dedicated to making a difference in what they do."

Evaluation findings: staff case studies

Would you recommend the programme to other hospitals/trusts/community services?

"Definitely"

Why did you decide to adopt the Volunteer to Career programme?

"I think it's wonderful to support these volunteers in progressing internally, to recognise their skill set, commitment and what they can bring to the trust."

What was the best thing about adopting VtC at our Trust?

"I felt honoured to be part of a team helping to build the future. It was lovely to share the journey of the CFR's spending a "day in the life" of an ECA and see their passion and dream turning into reality."

Marisa Ellis - EEAST ECA

Would you recommend the programme to other hospitals/trusts/community services?

"Yes"

Why did you decide to adopt the Volunteer to Career programme?

"A recruitment stream to help tackle workforce numbers."

Were there any challenges of adopting the VtC programme?

"Needed time to develop and ensure robust process."

What was the best thing about adopting VtC at our Trust?

"Able to allow potential employees to try before you sign up for substantive employment."

James Forbes - Staff Member at EEAST Training and Education

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions:

- The implementation of the VtC programme in East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust has been successful in organisational improvement related to volunteering, maintaining volunteers' interest in working for this organisation and improving staff perceptions of the impact that volunteers can have.
- While some small decreases were seen in volunteers' confidence about their career ambitions and interest in a health and care career, continued high proportions of volunteers had an interest in working for this organisation and in pursuing further education.
- The programme has helped the Trust to further integrate volunteering into workforce strategies and aided the development of effective career pathways for volunteers which have resulted in relevant paid employment in the NHS.
- Four volunteers from the 10 have been recruited during this pilot with others ready on completion of their training.

Recommendations:

- To continue scaling the programme at EEAST
- NHS Charities to fund 2024, with EEAST BAU in 2025
- To continue to address career inequalities and recruit 18 volunteers in 2024 for the program
- To measure by those employed from the programme

Acknowledgements:

Our Volunteer to Career (VtC) programme was carried out in partnership between our organisation and Helpforce, with funding from NHS England.

Helpforce has been an invaluable partner in helping us set up and deliver this programme and has also supported us in analysing the data, setting out the impact evidence of this programme.

- Lorna Hayes, Helen Adams, Recruitment, CFR Training, TrainEEAST, Driver Training Unit
- Ant Kitchener, People Services
- Marisa Ellis, Holly Snowling, Julia Horswell, Marie Foundos, Gary Ball, James Forbes, Kate Nicholls, Hayley Womack, Caron Keene's, Ann Usher, Richard Armitage, Richard Buller Norwich Ambulance Station and Essex Ambo Station and staff in EOC in Norwich and Essex

All findings, conclusions and recommendations are from Vikki Darby at East of England Ambulance Service

About Helpforce:

Helpforce works with health and care organisations across the UK to accelerate the growth and impact of volunteering to keep people healthy in their communities and support them during treatment and after. It is an independent, not-for-profit innovator, focused on co-creating on and evaluating volunteering projects, and rapidly sharing insights and best practice. To learn more about the charity, visit www.helpforce.community.

Thank you



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helpforce



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Analysis completed by Helpforce, 2023.