

# Ward Support Volunteers

**Derbyshire Community Health Services  
NHS Foundation Trust**

**Evaluation Report - June 2023**

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# Executive summary

## The project

Since October 2022, ward support volunteers have been supporting patients and staff at Ilkeston and Ripley 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 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. These include improved patient wellbeing, enhanced patient and family/carer hospital experience, improved staff perceptions of volunteers and development of new skills for volunteers.

## Conclusion

The findings of this ward support volunteering project demonstrate the positive impact of volunteer involvement in the hospital setting. Volunteers improve patients' moods, foster connections with families/carers, and enhance the overall hospital experience. Families/carers also benefit from the volunteer support, leading to positive perceptions of the hospital. Staff members appear to value volunteers and believe they are beneficial for patients, families and carers. They did, however, suggest further improvements could be made related to communication and co-ordination. Volunteers themselves reported skill development and improved confidence, as well as increased interest in health and career careers as a result of their volunteering experience.

## Key findings



# Introduction

- 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.
- The volunteering role aimed to **improve patients and their loved one's experience**, as well as provide **support to staff members**.
- 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.

# 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 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.

Evaluation of the Ward Support volunteer project at the Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust was completed using data captured from patients, families/carer, staff members and volunteers. We are looking to answer the following questions about the project:

- Has it improved the patients' hospital experience?
- Has it resulted in an enhanced family/carer experience?
- Has it improved staff perceptions towards volunteering?
- What affect has it had on 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 four different collection methods:

- **Patient surveys**, asking questions regarding their volunteer support and hospital experience.
- **Family / Carer surveys**, asking questions around perceptions of the quality of care and support received.
- **Staff surveys**, completed before (referred to as 'pre-surveys') and after (referred to as 'post-surveys') the ward support volunteering initiative was implemented. Questions pertained 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.

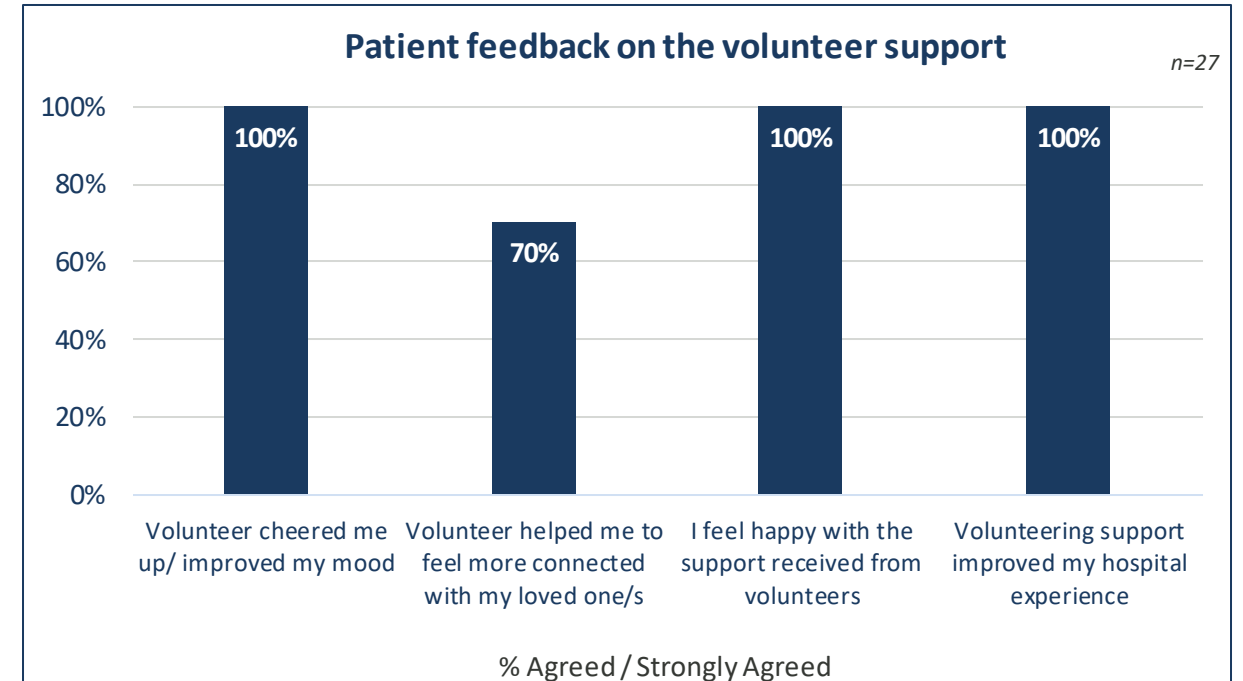
Between October 2022 and April 2023, we received:



# Impact: Patient hospital experience and wellbeing

Patient feedback suggests that volunteers had a positive impact on their hospital experience.

- 100% of patients agreed or strongly agreed that the **volunteers had a positive impact on their mood**, cheering them up during their hospital stay.
- 100% of patients also agreed that **volunteering support improved their hospital experience** and **were satisfied with the volunteer support** they received.
- Additionally, 70% of the patients reported feeling **more connected with their loved ones** as a result of the volunteers' support.



# Patient feedback

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



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

Patient



**"It is nice to be around happy, kind people - they really are lovely."**

Patient



**"Spoke with the volunteer, had a right laugh reminiscing - great experience."**

Patient



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

Patient



**"Volunteers keep me company. My husband comes for afternoon visiting but no one comes in the evening. I have been in hospital since Christmas day, so a long time."**

Patient



**"Volunteers definitely improved hospital experience. One day a volunteer spent over an hour with me. My wife cannot come as live too far away."**

Patient



**"Volunteers welcomed every time they are on the ward. Having no family or friends visiting, [it was] nice to see and speak to someone."**

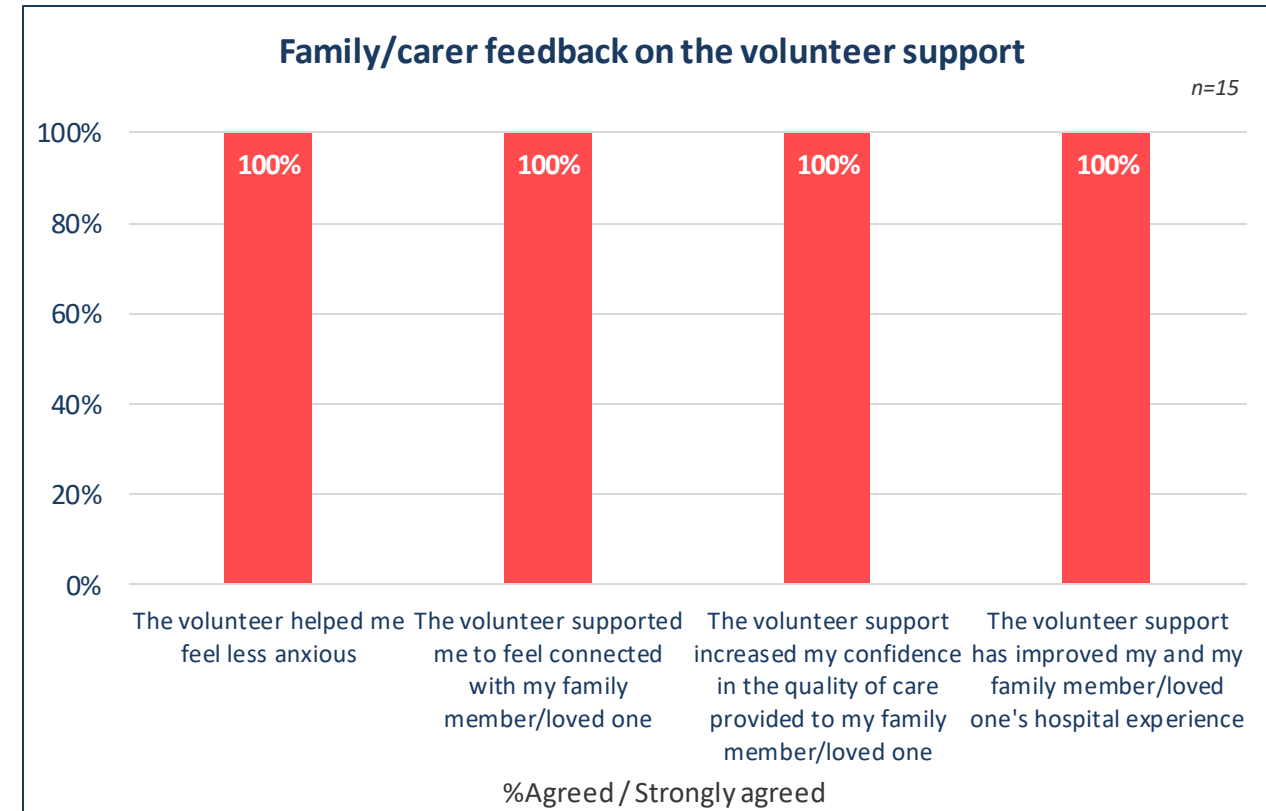
Patient



# Impact: Family/carer experience and wellbeing

From the family/carer perspective, results indicate that the volunteers played a significant role in improving their experience.

- 100% of family/carers agreed or strongly agreed that:
  - volunteers helped them to **feel less anxious** during their loved one's hospital stay;
  - the volunteers supported them to **feel connected with their loved one**;
  - the volunteer support **improved their loved one's hospital experience** and **increased their confidence in the quality of care provided**.



# Family/carerer feedback

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



**“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



**“I felt guilty I could only visit every Sunday as we live quite a distance from the hospital and working full time. It’s nice that my mum is kept company by such nice, kind people. She always tells me she has had volunteer company.”**

Family member



**“Having volunteers shows the hospital is doing all they can to keep patients happy and less isolated. I can’t believe so many volunteers give their time to help patients.”**

Family member



**“Nice to know someone sits with my nan in the afternoons when we are all at work and cannot visit. Such nice, caring people who do this role.”**

Family member



**“Nice to know there are caring, kind people in the world who want to help patients in their time of need. Great service - my grandmother enjoys the volunteer support, she always tells me about them when they have sat with her.”**

Family member



**“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

# Impact: Staff member perceptions of volunteers

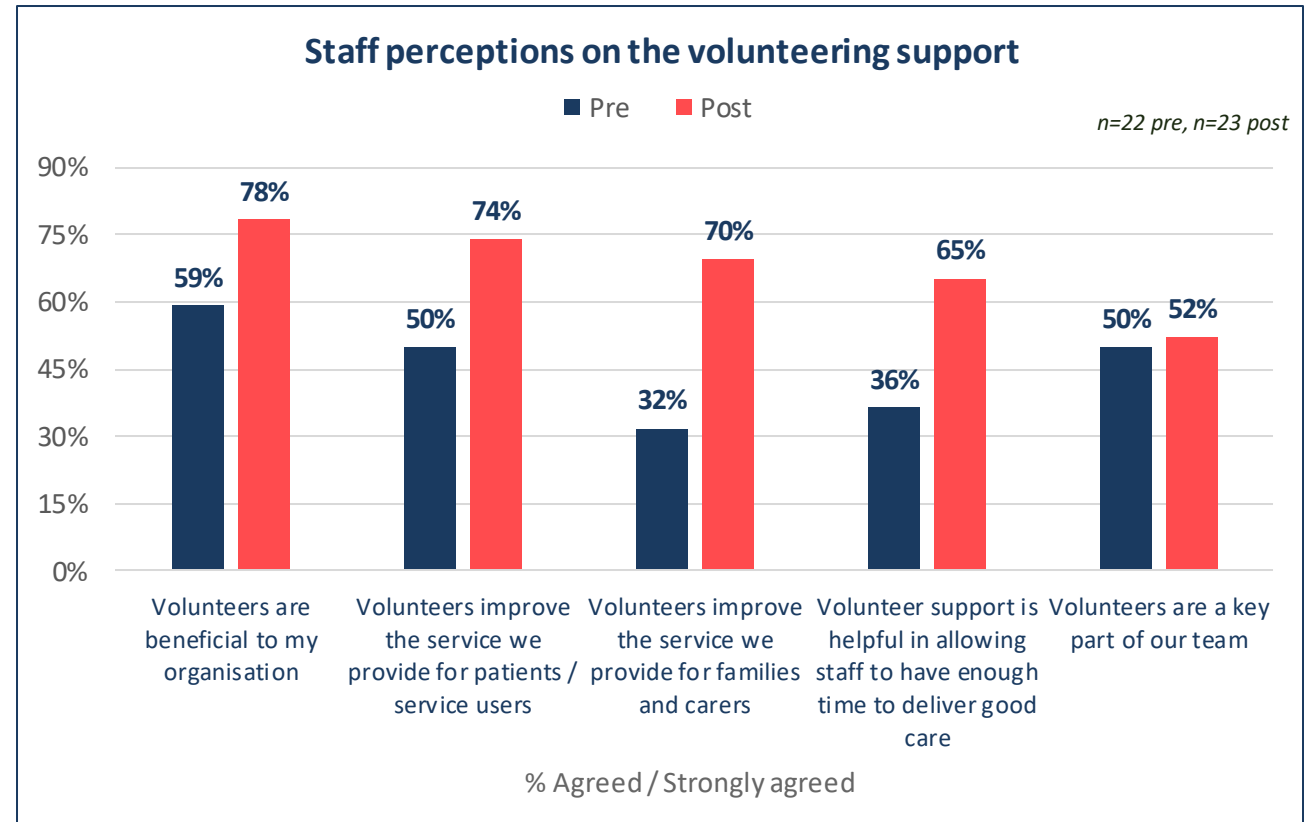
Staff members were asked to reflect on their experience of working alongside volunteers. Overall, the results indicate a positive change in staff perceptions regarding the benefits of volunteers to the organisation.

## Increased percentage of staff agreed or strongly agreed that:

- **volunteers are beneficial to the organisation** (increasing from 59% before the ward support volunteering initiative was implemented, to 78% after);
- **volunteers improve the service provided for patients** (50% to 74%);
- **the service provided for families and carers improved as a result of the volunteering support** (from 32% to 70%);

The proportion of staff members who agreed or strongly agreed that volunteer support is **helpful in allowing them enough time to deliver good care also increased**, rising from 36% to 65%. Further, 35% of the staff members reported that the volunteers freed up some time for them, ranging from 20 to 60 minutes on average per interaction. 14 staff felt volunteers had neither a positive nor negative impact on their time. However, one colleague reported they generated extra work.<sup>1</sup>

A small increase in staff perceptions of volunteers being a key part of the team was also noted. This may indicate that there is room for further integration of volunteers an integral part of the team.



Please note that firm conclusions cannot be drawn solely based on the comparison of the above data on staff outcomes as we are unable to ascertain if the same individuals completed both the pre- and post-surveys.

<sup>1</sup>n=23

# Staff feedback

- Staff members were asked to reflect on whether their recent interactions with volunteers had influenced their perceptions of the positive or negative impacts that volunteers can have. Out of the 23 responses, **12 staff expressed a more positive experience than expected**, while 10 staff reporting that their experiences aligned with their initial expectations. However, one individual noted a more negative experience than anticipated.
- Overall, staff members recognised volunteer contributions, with a sense that the ward support role had a positive impact on both staff and patients. Further staff stated that volunteers were a great support system for patients, providing comfort and conversation when regular staff may not have time.



"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



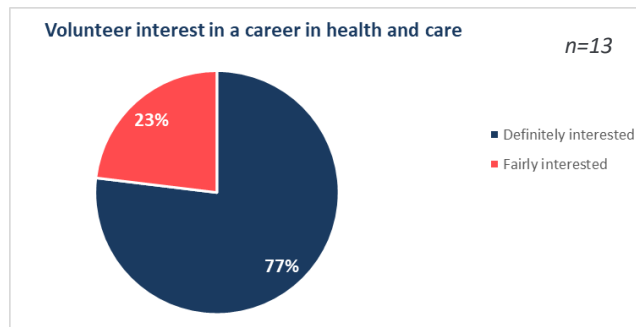
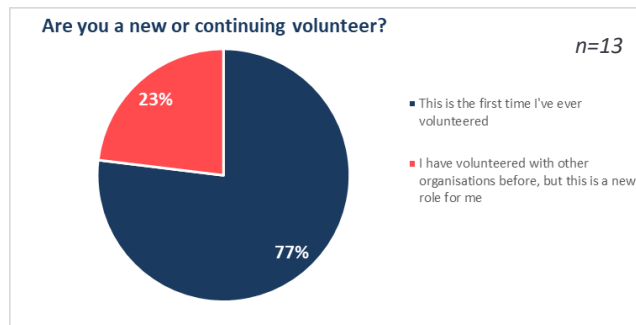
"It is lovely to see the volunteers arrive on the ward, the staff enjoy getting to know them and it has been lovely to see their confidence grow and help them with their future career paths. The patients enjoy the company, and it does free time up for staff when they are around."

Staff member

- However, staff did suggest that improvements could be made. They suggested:
  - There are varying levels of proactivity amongst volunteers, with some taking on responsibilities independently and others needing more guidance;
  - Clear communication and consistent attendance are important for effective coordination;
  - They would like to see an increased variation in the tasks volunteers could undertake – whilst volunteers were valued for their social contributions to patient care, there were some calls for them to be involved in housekeeping;
  - Additional consideration should be given to the timing of volunteering shifts, to ensure optimal patient interaction.

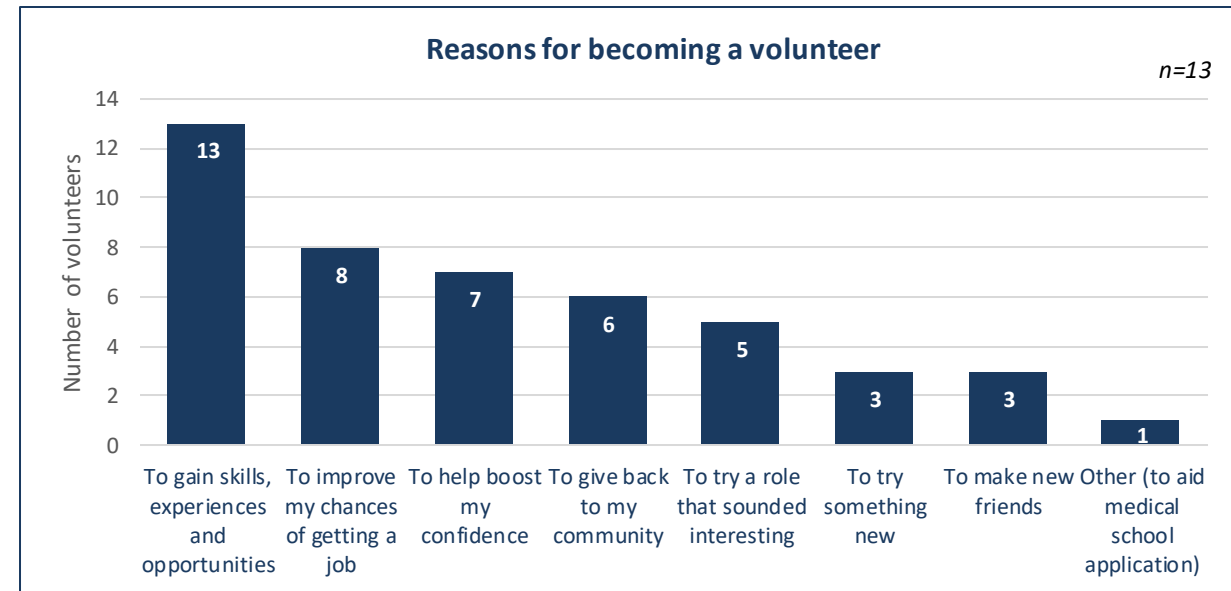
# Insight: Volunteer onboarding

- **77% of volunteers** shared that **this is the first time they have volunteered**. The remaining respondents had volunteered with other organisations before, but this is a new role for them.
- **100% of volunteers** were **interested in pursuing a health and care career** to varying levels of certainty. However, 10 of 13 respondents suggested they were definitely interested in exploring this career path.



Before starting in role, volunteers were asked to report on their reasons for volunteering, previous experience and interest in a health and care career.

- When asked about the reasons behind becoming a volunteer, all 13 respondents suggested they **wished to gain skills, experience and opportunities**. Further, 8 of the 13 volunteer responses hoped that they would **improve their chances of gaining future employment**. This clearly illustrates that volunteers were motivated to volunteer by skills and employability outcomes.



# Insight: Volunteer onboarding

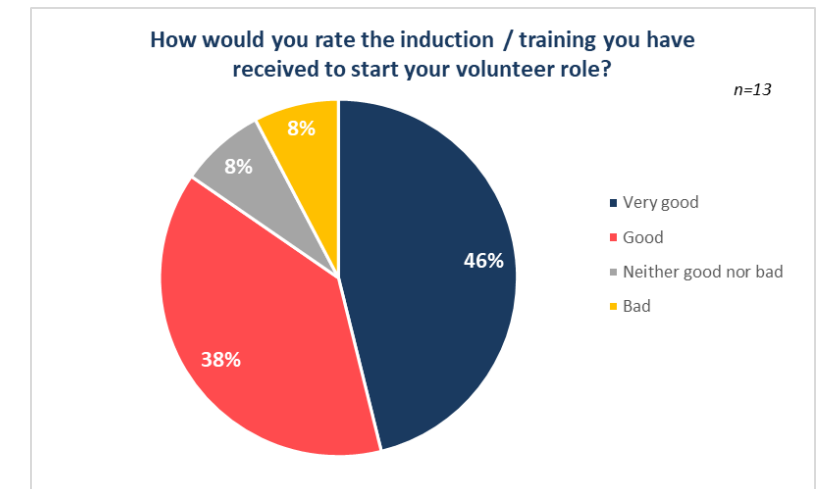
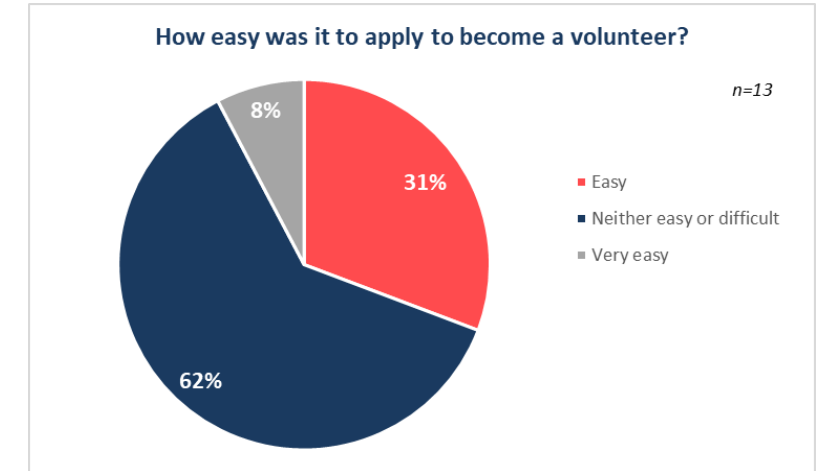
Within the pre-survey, volunteers were asked to reflect on their application experience. Many appeared to have had a positive experience.

- **62% of volunteers** found applying to become a volunteer **neither easy or difficult**, while **38%** of them said **it was easy or very easy**.
- Volunteers who had a positive experience explained that *“it was an easy process and straightforward”* and that *“ [the volunteering officer] was very good at answering any questions I had along the application process”*.
- Those who stated it was neither easy nor difficult suggested *“it was a lengthy process though from first applying to the start date”*.

Volunteers were also asked to provide feedback on the induction and onboarding training they received.

- 11 of 13 volunteers rated their **induction/training as very good or good**. They shared that the induction *“was well organised”* and *“staff were really friendly and was overall very informative”*.
- However, one volunteer rated the induction experience as bad, and further explain not feeling well prepared for the role.
- Additionally, **91% of volunteers** expressed they **received enough support** from the volunteer team. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>n=13



# Impact: Volunteer emotional wellbeing

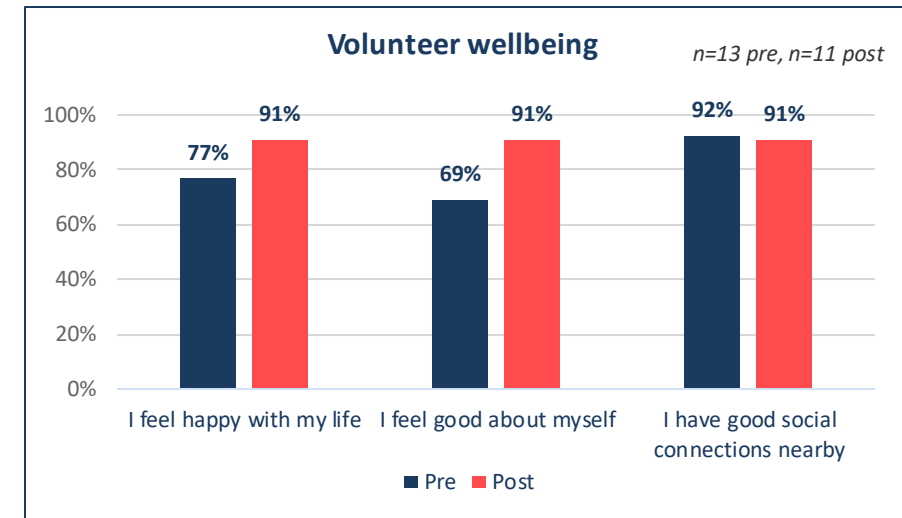
Before and after the programme, volunteers were asked to reflect upon statements related to the anticipated volunteer outcomes of the project regarding volunteer wellbeing. The results indicate that the majority of volunteers experienced a positive impact on emotional wellbeing outcomes as a result of their volunteering.

- After the programme, the proportion of volunteers who agreed or strongly agreed that **they felt good about themselves** increased by 22%. Additionally, the proportion of volunteers who felt **happy with their lives** increased by 14%.

The percentage of volunteers who agreed they had good social connections was high at the start of the volunteering intervention, with 92% of volunteers agreeing. This remained relatively consistent as a result of the project with 91% of volunteers agreeing post volunteering.

After undertaking their volunteering roles for some time, volunteers provided feedback on the difference volunteering had made to them. Results indicate volunteering had a positive impact for the ward support volunteers.

- 91% of the volunteers agreed or strongly agreed that **volunteering gave them a sense of purpose and increased their confidence**.

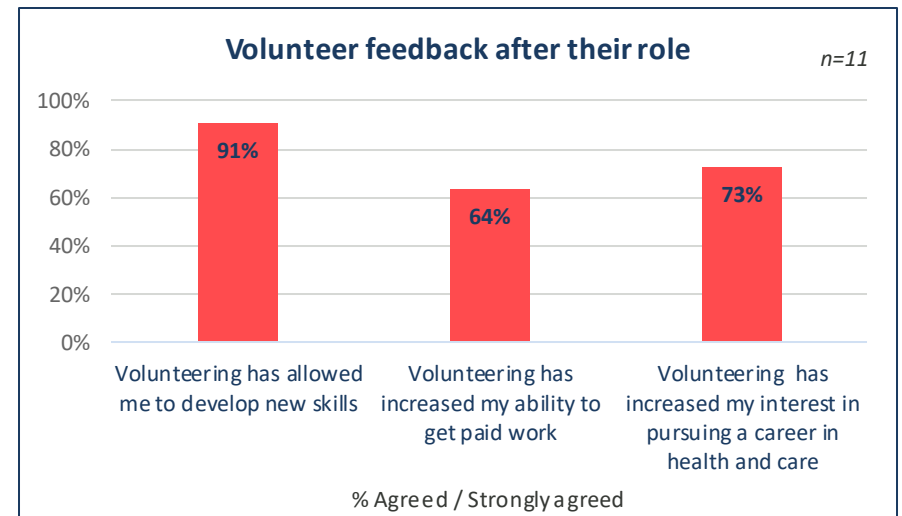
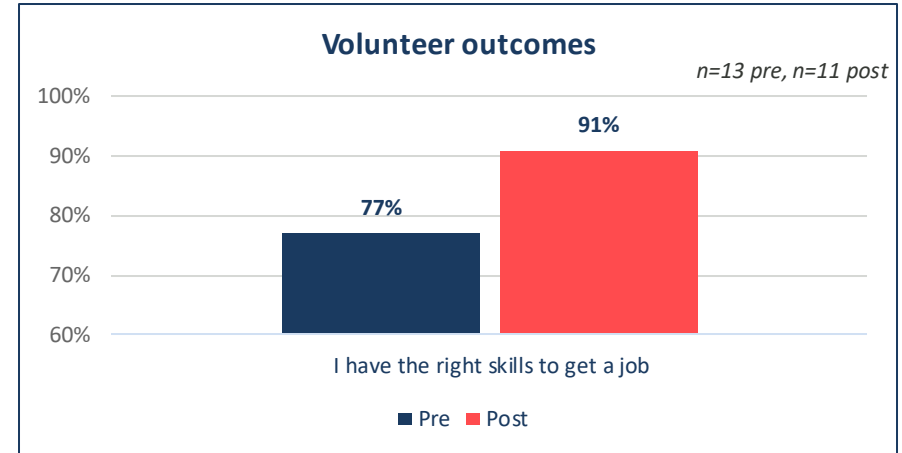


Please note that firm conclusions cannot be drawn solely based on the comparison of the above data on volunteer outcomes as we are unable to ascertain if the same individuals completed both the pre- and post-surveys.

# Impact: Volunteer skills/employability

Volunteers were also asked to reflect on statements related to the anticipated outcomes of the project concerning skills and employability. The results suggest that a majority of the volunteers reported a positive impact on their skills and employability outcomes as a result of their volunteering experience.

- After the programme, the proportion of volunteers who felt **they had the right skills to get a job** increased by 14%, indicating volunteers felt they developed transferable skills as a result of their volunteering.
- All volunteers hoped that volunteering would help them to gain skills, experiences and opportunities (as reflected on slide 13). For many, this appears to have been realised, with 91% of volunteers agreeing that volunteering has helped them to **develop new skills**. Further, 64% felt volunteering has increased their ability to secure paid work.
- Additionally, 73% agreed or strongly agreed that volunteering **has increased their interest in pursuing a career in health and care**, illustrating that volunteering in a hospital environment can provide individuals with a real insight and ability to explore what a health care career might entail.



Please note that firm conclusions cannot be drawn solely based on the comparison of the above data on volunteer outcomes as we are unable to ascertain if the same individuals completed both the pre- and post-surveys.



# Volunteer feedback

Volunteers were asked to reflect on the impact they felt their role had for the people they supported...



**"I believe that our presence and helping out around the ward takes a pressure off the nurses a little."**

Volunteer



**"I can [help] people feel less lonely."**

Volunteer



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

Volunteer



**"It helps the nurses as my role takes little tasks of their to do list, so they have more time to do other jobs and see patients. The patients feel listened to and are happy that someone is talking to them."**

Volunteer



**"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."**

Volunteer



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

Volunteer



# Conclusions

The findings of this ward support volunteering project has demonstrated that volunteer support in the hospital setting can have a positive impact for patients, families/carers, staff members and volunteers.

- Volunteer support can improve patients' moods, increase the feeling of connections to their family members/carers, and enhance the overall hospital experience.
- Families/carers can also benefit from the support provided by volunteers, resulting in increasingly positive perceptions of the hospital.
- Staff members acknowledged the value of volunteers, resulting increased positive perceptions towards volunteering. However, staff members did suggest improvements could be made to the volunteering initiative – their feedback highlights the necessity for enhanced communication between staff and volunteers, clearer task instructions for volunteers, and coordinated timing to maximise the impact of volunteers effectively.
- Finally, volunteers report positive experiences and achievement of several anticipated outcomes as a result of volunteering, including developing a sense of purpose and increased confidence. Additionally, for the majority of volunteers, they began volunteering to gain new skills and experiences, and to improve their chances of securing employment. For many, this appears to have been achieved – further, interest in a health and care career was increased as a result of volunteering in the ward support role.

The next steps will involve the ongoing recruitment of ward support volunteers across the eight community hospitals, acknowledging the positive value that volunteers can bring to the ward.

# helpforce

## Thank you

[help@helpforce.community](mailto:help@helpforce.community)  
[www.helpforce.community](http://www.helpforce.community)