

Impact report

2024/25



helpforce



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Introduction

A warm welcome to Helpforce's Impact report for 2024-25 - a year that has seen the charity take purposeful strides towards transforming volunteering across healthcare, while adapting to significant external and internal change.



Jayne Blacklay
Chair



Amerjit Chohan
Chief Executive

During a period in which healthcare services have continued to weather immense pressures, alongside an overhauling of NHS structures in England, the consistent contribution of dedicated volunteers to the nation's health and wellbeing has been of critical importance.

By providing unrivalled volunteering knowledge, data, and analysis to NHS and community partners, Helpforce has greatly extended its reach and impact – measurably improving the lives of more patients, more staff, and more volunteers.

A standout achievement concerns our flagship *Back To Health* programme, which was established in 2022 to help people across the UK live well, wait well, get well, and recover well, through the support of volunteers. In February 2025 we hit the incredible milestone of 'one million people reached' and, in recognition, we were delighted to be awarded a GSK Impact Award – a highly sought-after accolade for

healthcare charities in the UK.

We've also seen continued growth in our innovative Volunteer to Career programme, which empowers people to transition from volunteering roles to frontline healthcare careers or training. Partnering with 61 organisations – such as NHS Trusts and hospices – we've helped address healthcare workforce shortages by supporting people from all walks of life to secure permanent roles, including as healthcare assistants, mental health support workers and assistant physiotherapists.

For the longest time, volunteering was overlooked by healthcare leaders and considered a 'nice to have'. But since its formation eight years ago, Helpforce has dispelled that view as a strategic error. Through our evidence-based programmes, we've proved that the voluntary and community sector hold a wealth of potential to contribute to the operational and strategic objectives of healthcare organisations.

Back in September 2024, Lord Darzi's report diagnosed a crisis in our NHS. We know the voluntary sector can play a significant role in

working with the government to get services back on their feet. We're continually engaging with healthcare leaders to help bring about the changes required; shifting care closer to home, getting people off long waiting lists, driving productivity in hospitals, and re-engaging staff.

The beginning of 2025 saw the charity wave a fond farewell to Mark Lever, who retired after five successful years as Chief Executive and is succeeded by Amerjit Chohan who brings 30 years' experience of growing health charities to the role. Meanwhile, Jayne Blacklay succeeded Anna Dixon MP as Chair. A Strategic Adviser for the Foundation Group of Trusts in the Midlands, Jane has been a Helpforce trustee since the charity's formation in 2017.

With the continued support of our generous funders, forward-thinking partners, and highly motivated staff and Trustees, we're optimally poised to pursue our vision of a nation where volunteering is integral to healthcare at its very best.

About Helpforce

Helpforce is the only UK charity solely focussed on advancing high-impact volunteering across healthcare.

The nation’s healthcare systems face many challenges, with staff under immense pressure. Volunteers are already part of the solution - and they could play an even bigger role.

With NHS and community partners, we have built unrivalled experience and evidence of the contribution volunteering makes to the wellbeing of patients, staff and volunteers themselves.

We bring specialist knowledge and tools to alliances, working with organisations to establish and evaluate volunteering solutions that get to the heart of their challenges.

We have established that 87% of healthcare staff feel volunteers improve the quality of service they can provide; while 82% of people supported through volunteer-led healthcare report reduced anxiety.

Our Vision... is for a nation where volunteering is integral to healthcare at its very best

Our Mission... is to transform volunteering across healthcare, delivering measurable benefits for patients, professionals and communities

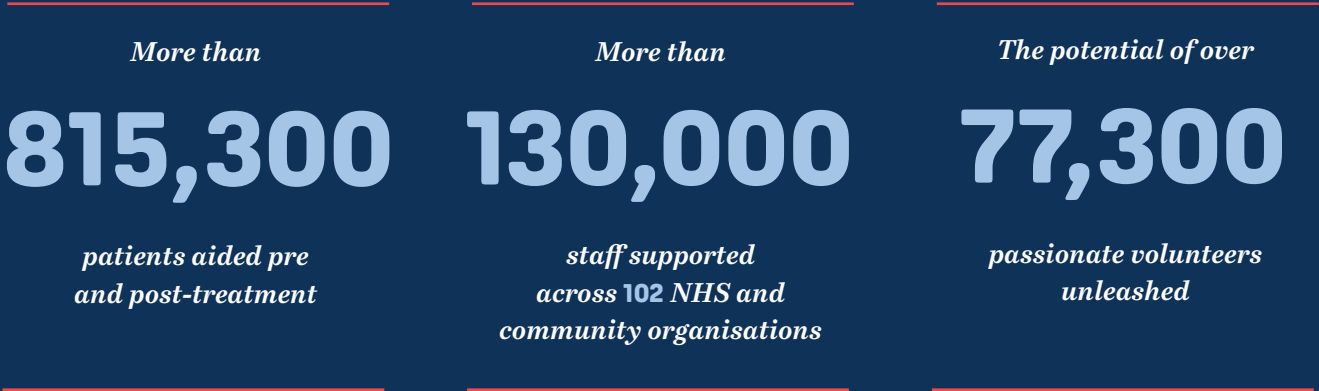
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Tens of thousands of volunteers currently support our precious NHS - we want to optimise and grow this incredible pool of talent. But there’s also an enormous opportunity to unlock the capacity and capability of the 6.5m people who volunteer in local communities.”

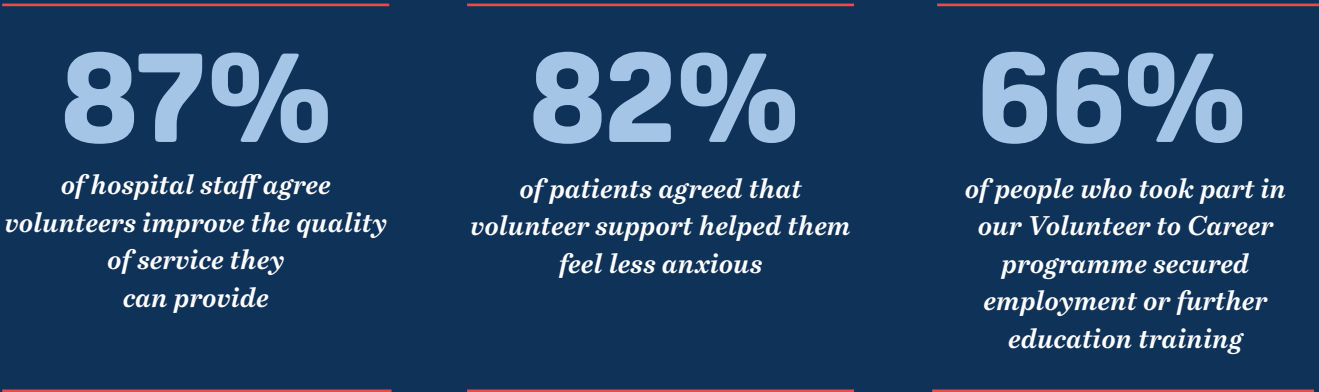
Amerjit Chohan, Helpforce CEO

Our helpforce year in numbers

Through our flagship Back to Health programme, we hit the milestone of over 1 million people reached, including:



Our expert analysis showed that:



Thanks to our supporters and alliances, we:



Delivering Impact - Waiting well

As Lord Darzi set out in his review of the NHS, waiting times have significantly increased over the past 15 years and reversing this will take time. The impact of sustained long waiting lists can be moderated by helping people to ‘wait well’.

Helpforce has worked with partners offering successful community-based prehabilitation or ‘shape up for surgery’ services. Research suggests the fitter, stronger and healthier patients are going into surgery, the lower the risk of complications (such as infections and blood clots), the more successful the operation, and recovery, are likely to be. This reduces the length of stay after the operation.

The impact of sustained long waiting lists can be moderated by helping people to ‘wait well’

Case study

Helpforce is supporting Hillingdon Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and voluntary sector organisation Third Sector Together to establish and evaluate a community-based call centre, helping people to ‘wait well’.

The project focuses on a Primary Care Network area with high levels of deprivation and health inequality, with an initial focus on ophthalmology appointments, where there had been high ‘did not attend’ rates - with potentially significant consequences if people don’t get the right treatment at the right time.

Following a pre-approved script, volunteers call patients to remind them of their appointment and explore how the individual has been managing while waiting, as well as any difficulties experienced. The volunteers then take any necessary actions, such as providing guidance about the appointment, reassuring patients,



and identifying any useful referrals to community services. Volunteers can escalate concerns, prompting a Trust clinical lead to call the patient. This has been particularly beneficial where patients are concerned their eyesight is worsening.

The scheme has driven a 15% relative reduction in the level of missed ophthalmology appointments for patients living in the target area (from 13.2% to 12.2%). Furthermore, the reduction was even higher for those living in neighbourhoods with high deprivation (17.3% to 12.2%).



“Partnering with the Trust, volunteers, and VCSEs, the project went beyond appointment reminders—it reduced DNAs, tackled health inequalities, and connected individuals to vital community support.”

Fiona Hill, Managing Director, Third Sector Together

“““



“Hillingdon is a brilliant example of empowering people to ‘wait well’ and Helpforce is proud to support many other such schemes across the UK.”

Sara Miles, Helpforce Programme Manager

Delivering Impact - Getting well

One way that volunteers can have a positive impact on healthcare services and patients is by offering support to people while they are recovering in hospital.

Often, being hospitalised can be a challenging experience for people of all ages – physically, mentally and emotionally. Spending time away from loved ones can leave people feeling isolated and lonely – despite the best efforts of hard-working NHS staff. When patients feel down, it can impede recovery times. This adds to the pressures facing already stretched frontline clinical staff, impacting their workload and bed availability.

Helpforce has designed multiple volunteer-led programmes that meet these challenges by supporting people in getting well – including assisting vulnerable adults to eat and drink, providing companionship, encouraging people to improve their mobility through gentle bedside exercises and providing transport to outpatient appointments.

Case study



In the North East, a group of unassuming men and women start up their cars - week in, week out - to make a truly remarkable contribution to their local community.

The Volunteer Drivers’ Service, operated by North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust, helps people who are discharged from hospital to get home swiftly and safely, as well as providing transportation to and from outpatient appointments. They even collect and deliver orthotics equipment to people’s homes – such as splints and braces.

Having been involved in developing

the service over several years, Helpforce recently applied its evaluation expertise to assess the ongoing impact of the initiative.

We were able to calculate that the service is enabling the Trust to avoid outsourced transport costs of over £80,000 per year, with 98% of patients reporting that it helped them feel less anxious – demonstrating an outstanding impact on wellbeing in addition to practical support.



98%
of patients reporting that the service helped them feel less anxious



“What stands out with Helpforce’s Insight and Impact team is their genuine commitment to our work and their eagerness to help us improve”

Paul Wharton, Head of Volunteering North Tees NHS Foundation Trust

“““



“We cherish our involvement in volunteer driving services nationwide. They show that you don’t have to be a doctor or nurse to assist people in getting well.”

Kate Crossan, Helpforce Senior Data & Impact Analyst

Delivering Impact - Recovering well

When patients are discharged from hospital and return to their homes after surgery or treatment, they are often vulnerable - especially those who live alone. Susceptibility to falls is a major issue, with incidents not only causing suffering and distress to those affected, but hospital readmissions placing a major strain on over-stretched ambulance services, A&E departments and wards. Falls cost the NHS around £2.3 billion per year and studies

have indicated that a tailored exercise programme can decrease falls by 54%. Even for those who don't suffer falls, deconditioning is a significant problem that can affect overall recovery and inhibit an individual's chance of regaining their independence. Working with NHS Trusts across the country, Helpforce has designed targeted volunteer-led programmes that help people to recover well.

Falls cost the NHS around **£2.3 billion per year** and studies have indicated that a tailored exercise programme can decrease falls by

54%

Case study

Kingston and Richmond NHS Foundation Trust in London extended its gold-standard Falls Prevention initiative this year. Dedicated volunteers receive specialist training in how to support patients with post-hospital rehabilitation exercises. On their first visit to an individual's home, the volunteer is accompanied by a qualified physiotherapist who carefully explains and demonstrates the prescribed exercises, taking time to build confidence and familiarity with the movements. Then, over the course of a two-month period, the volunteer

visits the patient on a weekly basis to help them to undertake their exercises, providing encouragement and motivation – as well as a friendly face and someone to enjoy a cuppa with. Gradually, patients gain strength and confidence, and many find that they can return to activities that bring independence and happiness – whether it's getting on a bus to go grocery shopping or visiting grandchildren. The project resulted in a 32% increase in patients' 'confidence to cope' scores and over 93% of staff felt volunteers improved care quality.



"Helpforce's expertise has supported us to design a highly-effective, volunteer-led falls prevention service that meets the needs of our local community. We're proud of the impact it has had on patients, staff, and our incredible volunteers."
Jo Farrar, Chief Executive, Kingston and Richmond NHS Foundation Trust

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"Helping patients to recover well is an area where we're having tremendous impact, with Helpforce designed programmes active across multiple health and community organisations. The positive effect on staff delivering care cannot be overstated."

Maeve Hully, Helpforce Director of Volunteering



Jackie Harris received falls prevention support after returning home from a hospital stay. "The exercises aren't difficult. It was about getting my legs and hips strong. I got encouragement from my excellent volunteer."

Delivering Impact - Living well

Preventing people from getting ill or having accidents is one of the most effective ways of easing pressure on overstretched healthcare services. And of course, staying out of hospital or the GP's surgery is far better for patients and their families too. Our work with partners demonstrates the valuable role community-based voluntary services play in meeting people's needs without resorting to primary and secondary care.

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"This year we've applied our evidence-led evaluation expertise to nine different projects that help people take control of their own mental and physical health."

Kate Crossan, Helpforce Senior Data & Impact Analyst

Case study

Holme Farm is a volunteer-led community hub in Surrey offering activities such as a community garden, biodiversity activities, arts and crafts sessions, and upcycling of donated items. Their aim is to promote and encourage health, wellbeing and community, providing a therapeutic environment where people within Surrey can socialise, learn and thrive. A well-established service, Holme Farm needed to negotiate the lease of its site and attract funding to secure its future. Yet, as a volunteer-led organisation, it struggled with the expertise and resource to evaluate its inspiring contribution. Using our Insight & Impact evaluation service, we applied tested methodology to determine Holme Farm's contribution to the health and wellbeing of beneficiaries. We surveyed

250 individuals, conducted further in-depth interviews, gathered testimonials from partner organisations, and found that:

- 80% of users felt less lonely or isolated
- 91 % felt more connected to their community
- 84% had their expectations met or exceeded



Gareth, aged 22, was referred to Holme Farm after reaching crisis point and feeling suicidal. He initially attended for just two hours a week, but is now at the site almost every day, taking part in gardening. "When you talk to people here, they know what you're going through. You don't have to keep explaining yourself."

In addition to quantifying the benefits to the mental and physical health of those using the hub, we were also able to demonstrate the likely impact on local GP and mental health services if it were to close. The data helped this fantastic community resource build a compelling business case, supporting its long-term viability.



"We are immensely grateful for Helpforce's expertise which will be invaluable in us moving forward and continuing our services."
Ronnie Kendall, Holme Farm founder

Building the workforce - ‘Volunteer to Career’

A long-standing workforce crisis across healthcare services is negatively impacting patient care, waiting lists for treatment and diagnosis, staff morale and budgets. In the NHS, around 107,000 NHS secondary care roles are currently vacant in England alone, and the annual cost of using agency and bank staff has risen to more than £10 billion. There’s no magic wand to solving this long-standing issue, but Helpforce has a partial solution – and a significant one at that:

Our ‘Volunteer to Career’ scheme supports people from all walks of life who are interested in healthcare careers but don’t have a background in the field to gain valuable experience before applying for paid roles – such as healthcare assistants, mental health support workers and assistant physiotherapists – as well as further education or training. Among those who’ve successfully

made the transition are single mothers, college leavers, and individuals who have experienced long-term unemployment. This year saw us work with our 61st healthcare partner, extend the scheme to include hospices, and launch separate bespoke initiatives to attract former members of the armed forces and refugees.

66%
267 of 403 volunteers
secured employment
of further education/training

94,366
people supported
- patients, staff, and volunteers
helped by the projects

“““



“Volunteer to Career is transforming the lives of talented individuals who might not otherwise have seen themselves embarking on a healthcare career. At the same time, the scheme supports stretched existing frontline staff.”

Mark Burrett, Helpforce Programme Manager

Case study

Raahat Shah was about to embark on a university chemistry degree when a trip to Moorfields Eye Hospital with his grandfather – who suffered from Age Related Macular Degeneration – gave him a life-changing opportunity. Sitting through his grandad’s eye tests and watching the staff at work gave Raahat such a buzz of excitement that he immediately knew he wanted

to be part of the clinical world. When he learned about ‘Volunteer to Career’, he eagerly applied and spent a year helping out at Moorfields, getting a chance to observe cataract eye surgery. “It was amazing. I knew there and then that I wanted to be an eye surgeon.” Thanks to Helpforce, Rahaat is fulfilling his ambition. He’s midway

through a graduate medical training course and currently on a surgical placement at Basingstoke Hospital. He has a very proud granddad.



“We are delighted to have partnered with Helpforce. Volunteer to Career is an effective way of opening up healthcare career opportunities to people with no prior experience.”

Angela Smith, Chief Executive at Friends of Moorfields Eye Hospital

Our priorities for the future

Across the UK, healthcare services are under intense strain. Most of us will have witnessed hospital corridors full of patients on trolleys. Sadly, many will also have experienced unthinkable waits for ambulances to attend the homes of loved ones in need. And for those unable to work or enjoy basic daily pleasures because they are stuck on long waiting lists for surgery, life can seem bleak.

Add in the fact that we have an increasingly ageing population, an obesity crisis, a poor track record of diagnosing cancer early, and persistent NHS workforce issues – it’s perhaps unsurprising that some commentators feel the problems are insurmountable. Helpforce takes a different view.

With bold leadership, innovation, strategic investment, and the collective determination of everyone involved in delivering services, we believe that healthcare can get back to being its best – with volunteering playing an integral role. Helpforce has proven solutions to some of the biggest challenges facing healthcare. Through incredible partnerships, our evidence-based programmes have been tested at scale – and shown to work.

We would never suggest that volunteering is an answer to all of the problems, yet it has a significant contribution to make. To maximise that contribution, we must find ways to reach every NHS Trust, ambulance

service, hospice, and local community enterprise with our trusted expertise. We will build towards this by:

- Assembling scalable coalition models with the NHS, voluntary and community sector, and private enterprise – pooling funding and resources
- Relentlessly demonstrating value proposition, with robust ROI measurement baked-in to every project
- Strengthening our brand and gaining recognition as the UK’s leading organisation for healthcare volunteering – magnifying influence with health leaders
- Aligning our strategy with the NHS 10 Year Health Plan, trailblazing ‘shift to community’ success
- Forging strong alliances with respected organisations, gaining endorsement to help extend our reach

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“I passionately believe that we have an opportunity to unleash the full potential of healthcare volunteering to measurably improve the lives of patients, staff and – last but by no means least – volunteers themselves.”



Paddy Hanrahan, Helpforce Director of Strategy & Innovation

Delivering Impact – Working with funders

Helpforce is immensely grateful to the multiple funders who support our vital work, enabling impact at scale. We ensure the money we receive from generous trusts, foundations and statutory funders is used efficiently and effectively to transform healthcare volunteering.

Our philanthropic funding sometimes pays for a specific project or programme, such as the funding we received from The National Lottery Community Fund to work with Integrated Care Systems to develop volunteering services that optimise partnerships with community services.

Philanthropic funding also pays for Helpforce to continue to provide wider general services without a charge - such as our peer Network, where volunteering leaders across healthcare and community share knowledge, find practical support, and tap into resources. Meanwhile, funding directly from healthcare organisations often pays for our expertise to design, establish, scale up and evaluate volunteering solutions to meet specific regional or place-based needs.



The 'Back to Health' pathway has been Helpforce's key vehicle to help people across the UK live well, wait well, get well, and recover well. Recent National Lottery Community Fund support enabled extended rollout.

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“We were delighted to award Helpforce £876,240 for its 'ICS Back to Health Programme', allowing the charity to establish six place-based volunteering projects with Integrated Care Systems, focusing on how the NHS and Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise sector can work more closely together to help patients attend their appointments, get home when fit, and live well at home.”

Ruth Bamford
Funding & Relationship Manager,
National Lottery Community Fund



Helpforce was delighted to recently be awarded £1.2m from Oak Foundation over the next three years.

The grant helps bolster the charity's reputation as a credible and expert partner to healthcare and community organisations - designing, establishing, evaluating and growing the volunteering services that make a difference to people's health and wellbeing,

“““

“It's an enormous privilege to be supported by Oak. This incredible funding will help shift the innovation, impact and influence of volunteering in healthcare to a new level”

Amerjit Chohan
Chief Executive Helpforce

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