

Emergency Department Volunteers Evaluation Report

Kingston Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

January 2024 [v2]

helpforce



Contents

Executive summary	3
Service overview	4
Evaluation approach	5
Impact findings	7
Conclusion & Recommendations	21
Research limitations	22



Executive summary

The project

Kingston Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has been delivering an established Emergency Department (ED) volunteering role which has undergone significant improvements since the COVID-19 pandemic. The service involved volunteers providing support to patients and staff within their ED department, including providing patients with refreshments, company and assistance to make calls or arrange visits with loved ones, as well as housekeeping and restocking activities to support staff.

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 the necessary data is collected to prove and evidence the outcomes.

Key findings

Volunteers appear to have made a positive difference to patients' moods and wellbeing whilst in ED, as well as their overall experience. Additionally, volunteers appear to have made a positive difference to family members/carers' emotional wellbeing. Staff also expressed that they were satisfied with the support they received from volunteers and the majority agreed volunteers helped to improve the quality of care provided.

Volunteers themselves also realised personal benefits through volunteering, with the vast majority feeling satisfied with their experience.

Conclusions

The findings from the evaluation of the ED volunteering project demonstrates the positive impact of volunteer involvement in emergency department settings. Emerging findings suggest that the ED volunteering role has benefits for patients, family/carers, staff and the volunteers themselves. Additionally, volunteers appear to have been well integrated into the organisation.



Service Overview

- Emergency departments (ED) are often the focus of new reports with a focus on increasing demand and consequentially wait times for treatment. There were 25.3 million A&A attendances across England in 2022-23, an 18% increase since 2011-12. Additionally, in June 2023, Nuffield Trust reported that overall, there has been a year-on-year decrease in the proportion of patients attending major Accident & Emergency departments that are admitted, transferred, or discharged within four hours (the operational standard set in 2010).¹
- Kingston Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has an established volunteering role to support patients, families and staff during their time in the ED, which has undergone significant improvements since the COVID-19 pandemic. With the hope of improving their experience and wellbeing whilst in the department, ED volunteers engage in a variety of activities, including:
 - Assisting patients with refreshments, aiding good nutrition and hydration;
 - Providing companionship to promote their well-being;
 - Offering support for family calls and visits; and
 - Supporting departmental activities such as restocking and housekeeping.
- As of the evaluation period, there were **18** active volunteers fulfilling this essential role within the emergency department at Kingston Hospital.
- Between June 2023 to October 2023, a large amount of ED volunteer activity was reported. In total...

1,455

refreshments provided to patients

1,014

family & friend calls/visits supported

1,596

patients had direct contact with volunteers (sat with/spoken to)

110.5

hours of restocking support was delivered

149.5

hours of housekeeping support was delivered

¹ <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-accident--emergency-activity/2022-23>; 'A&E waiting times', Nuffield Trust, June 2023

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 prove and evidence the outcomes.

Evaluation of the ED volunteers project at Kingston Hospital NHS Foundation Trust was completed using data captured from patients, family/carers, volunteers and staff members. We were looking to answer the following questions about the project:

- What difference have volunteers made to the patients' and family/carer's hospital experience?
- What impact have ED volunteers had on staff perceptions towards volunteering?
- What impact has volunteering had for the volunteers themselves?

The emergency department volunteering role aims to achieve a multitude of positive **patient, family/carer, volunteer, staff and organisational outcomes.**



Evaluation approach: Methodology

The evaluation consisted of five different collection methods:

- **Patient surveys** completed following their interaction with ED volunteers, asking questions regarding their experience of receiving support and outcomes achieved.
- **Family/carer surveys** completed following their interaction with ED volunteers, asking questions regarding their experience of receiving support and outcomes achieved.
- **Staff surveys** completed as a one-off snapshot survey, asking questions about their experience of working alongside ED volunteers.
- **Volunteer surveys** completed by volunteers after delivering the role for some time, asking questions regarding their volunteer experience and perceived role impact.
- **Volunteer activity trackers** were completed by volunteers following their shifts to monitor the total activity they have delivered.



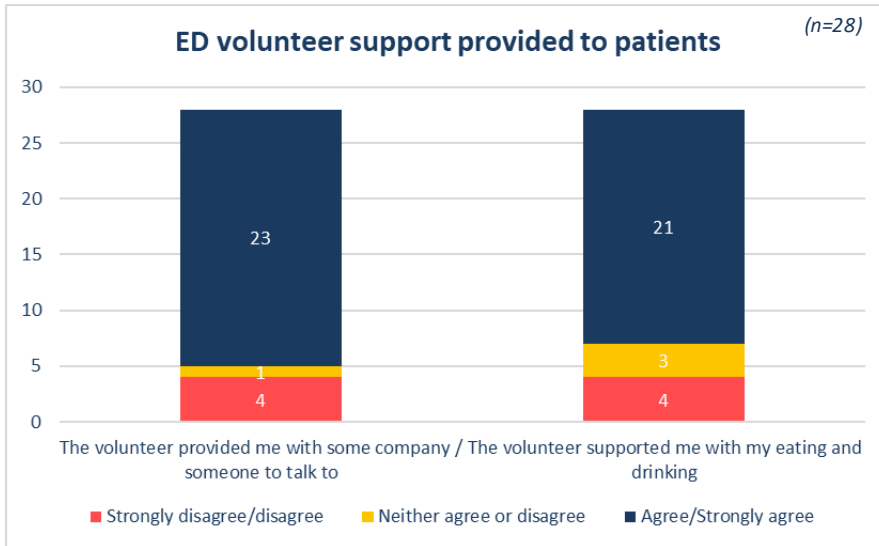
Throughout the report, data findings are linked back to the data collection method using icons at the top right-hand side of the screen. Evidence strength is also rated used icons. These icons are as below.



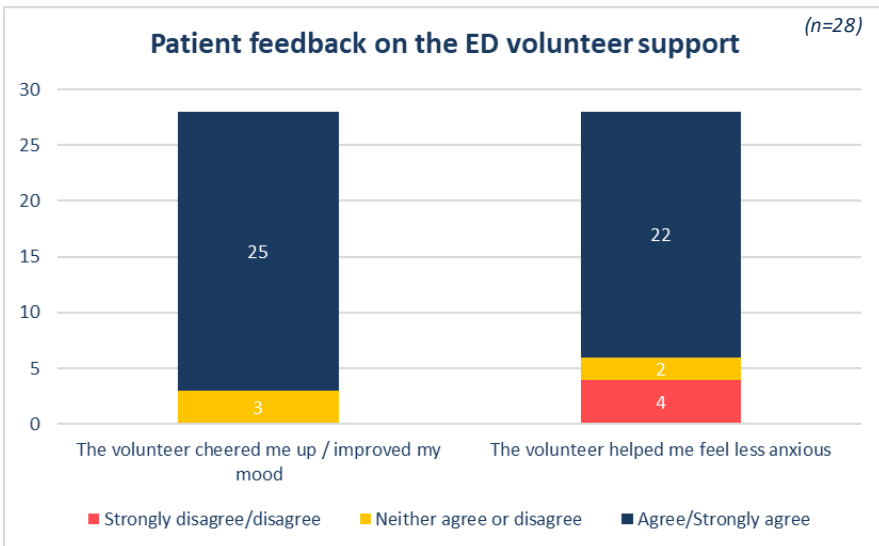
Impact: Patient wellbeing



Patients were asked to reflect on what support the ED volunteers provided to them and what difference this support made to their wellbeing.



- For many patients (23 of 28) volunteers appear to have **provided companionship** or someone to talk to during their time in ED.
- Volunteers also **supported patients with eating and drinking**, with 21 out of 28 patients agreeing the volunteers provided this support.



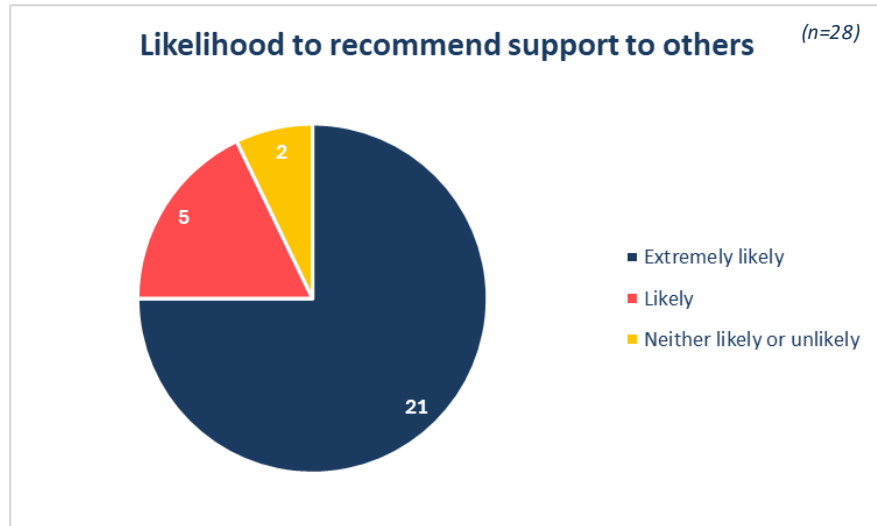
- Volunteers appear to have had a positive impact on patients' emotional wellbeing, with 25 of the 28 patients agreeing or strongly agreeing that volunteers **improved their mood**.
- Additionally, 22 patients agreed or strongly agreed that volunteer support **helped them to feel less anxious**.

These findings suggest that the provision of company and refreshments to patients has helped to improve their emotional wellbeing whilst in ED.

Impact: Patient experience



Patients were also asked if they would recommend this support to others if they required similar care or treatment.



- 26 out of 28 reported were extremely likely or likely to recommend the ED volunteering service to others in need of similar support.
- Out of these respondents, 21 stated that they were **extremely likely** to recommend it.

Additional feedback provided by patients further illustrates the difference ED volunteers made...



"Having the volunteer takes pressure off the medical staff."

Patient



"As I was in for 3 days, the volunteer was here for all 3 mornings early as she was the friendly face of Kingston Hospital. I am very anxious and have been upset and she has really helped me."

Patient



"Love this programme! Always having friendly faces to help out when needed."

Patient



"Very friendly and helpful, took the time to help me when other staff were too busy."

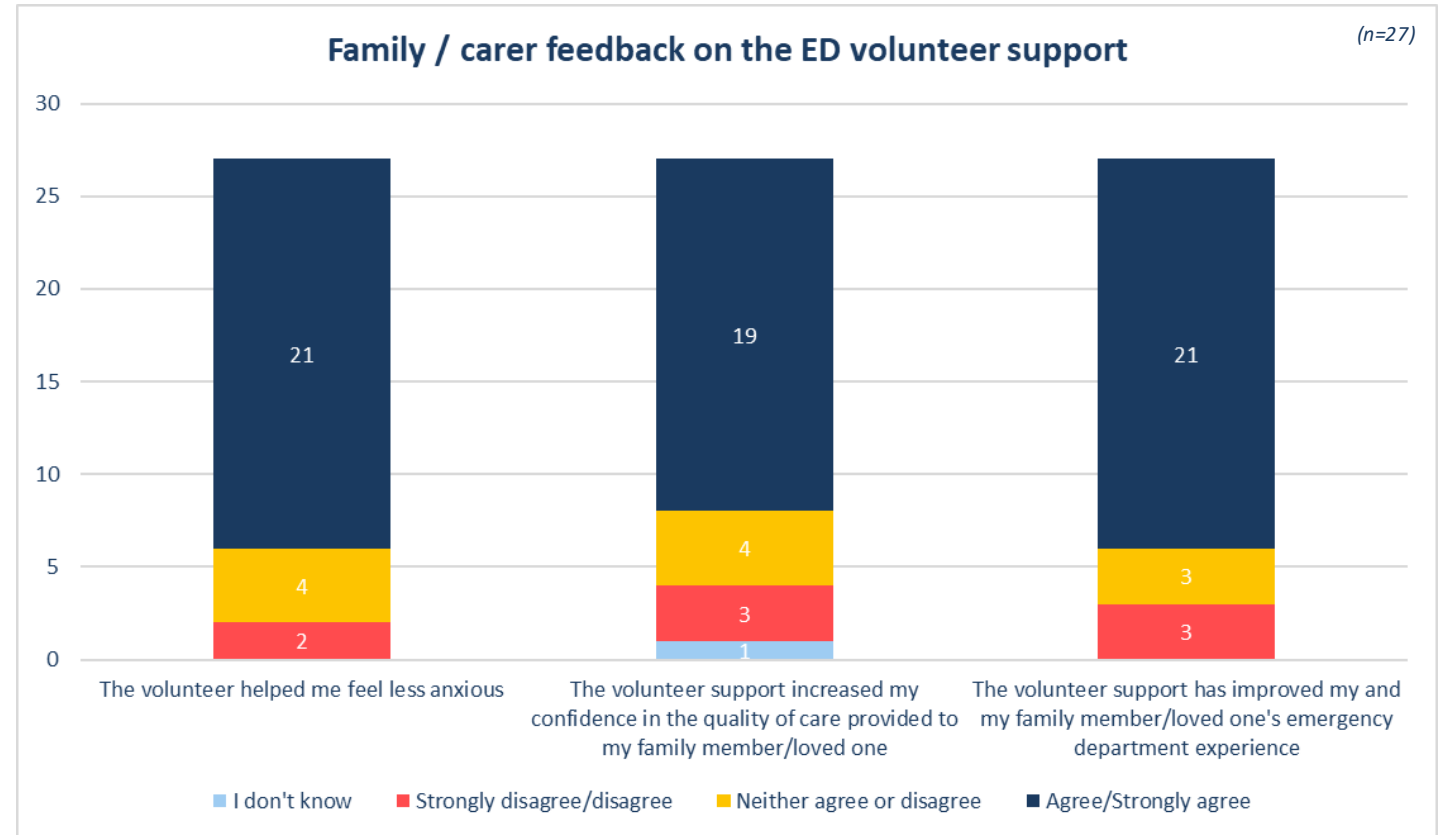
Patient

Impact: Family/carer wellbeing and experience



Family members and carers were asked to reflect on the difference volunteer support had made to their emotional wellbeing and experience.

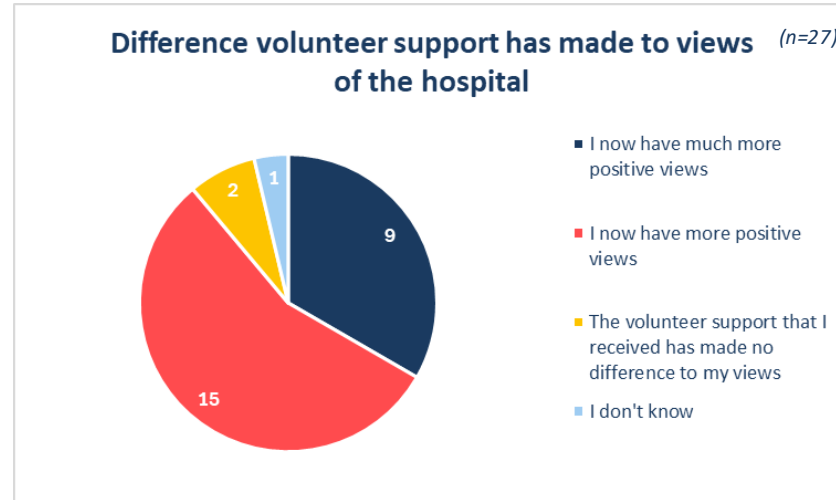
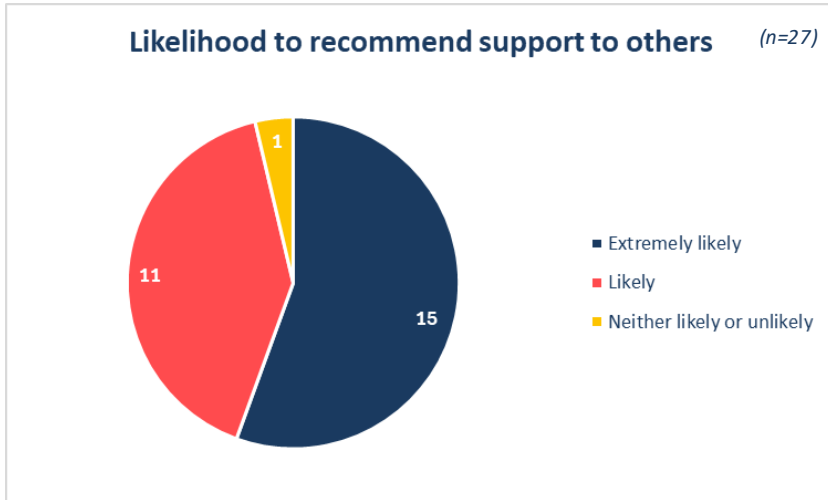
- Volunteers appear to have had a positive impact on family members/carers' emotional wellbeing, with 21 of 27 respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that volunteers **helped them to feel less anxious**.
- 19 family members/carers agreed or strongly agreed that volunteer support **increased their confidence in the quality of care** provided to their loved one.
- In addition, 21 of 27 family members/carers also felt that the volunteer support **improved their family member's ED experience**.



Impact: Family/carer experience



Family members and carers were also asked if they would recommend this support to others and if the support had made any difference to their views of the hospital.



- 26 of 27 family members/carers reported that they are **extremely likely or likely to recommend the ED volunteering service** to others. Of those, 15 family/carers said they were extremely likely to recommend.
- Additionally, 24 of 27 family members/carer reported that after receiving ED volunteer support they have **more positive views about the hospital**. Nine of those reported having **much more positive views**.

Additional feedback provided by family/carer further illustrates the difference ED volunteers made to them and their loved ones...


"Was just lovely to have been offered refreshments (which were very welcome) and meant I didn't need to leave my mum unattended. Thanks for doing what you do!"
Family/carer

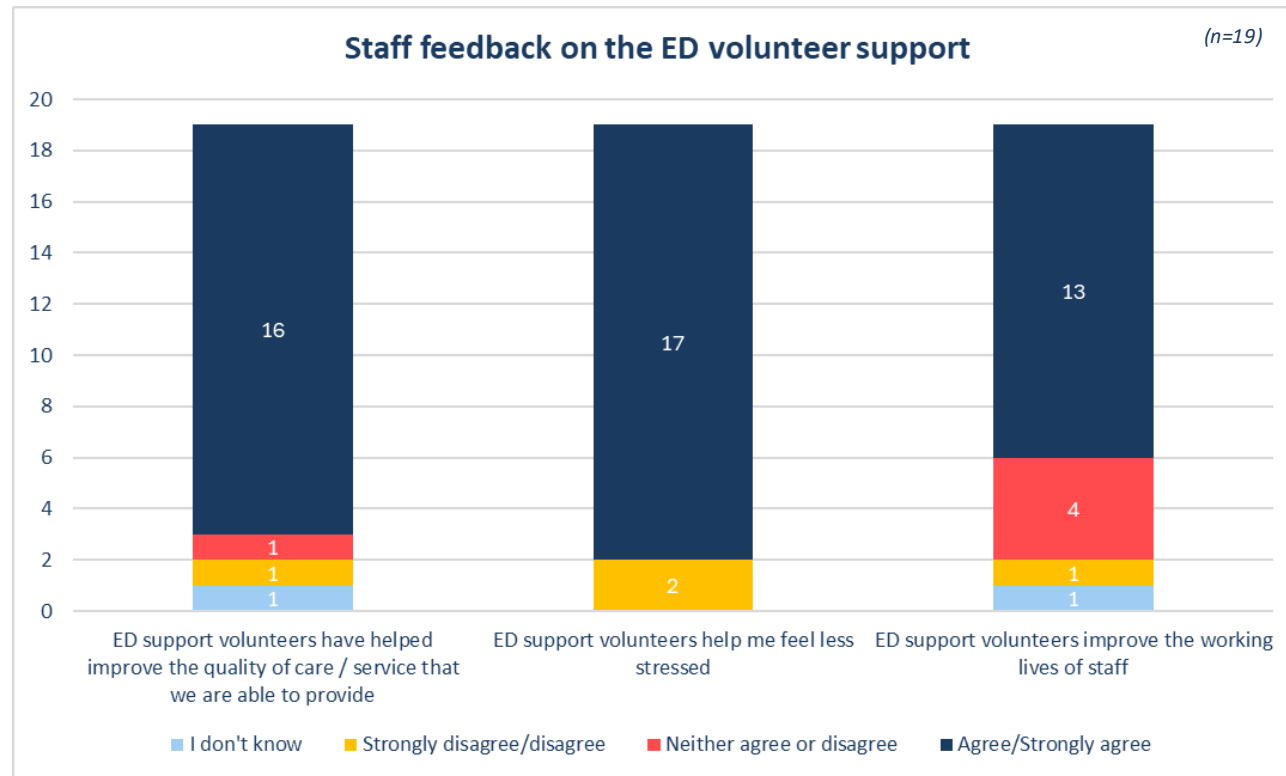

"The volunteers were so helpful and friendly. They helped me to keep calm amongst the general chaos."
Family/carer


"The volunteer was very approachable and friendly - made me feel less anxious."
Family/carer



Impact: Benefits for staff

Staff members were asked to reflect on their experience of working alongside volunteers. Overall, the feedback indicates positive staff perceptions of volunteers.



The majority of staff reported that they work with volunteers routinely.²

Of the 19 staff members who participated in the survey...

- 16 agreed or strongly agreed volunteers have **helped improve the quality of care / service** that they are able to provide to patients, suggesting staff members felt the volunteers' support had positive benefits for the patient experience.
- 17 agreed or strongly agreed volunteer support **helps them feel less stressed**.
- Additionally, 13 of 19 staff members agree or strongly agree volunteers **improve the working life of staff**.

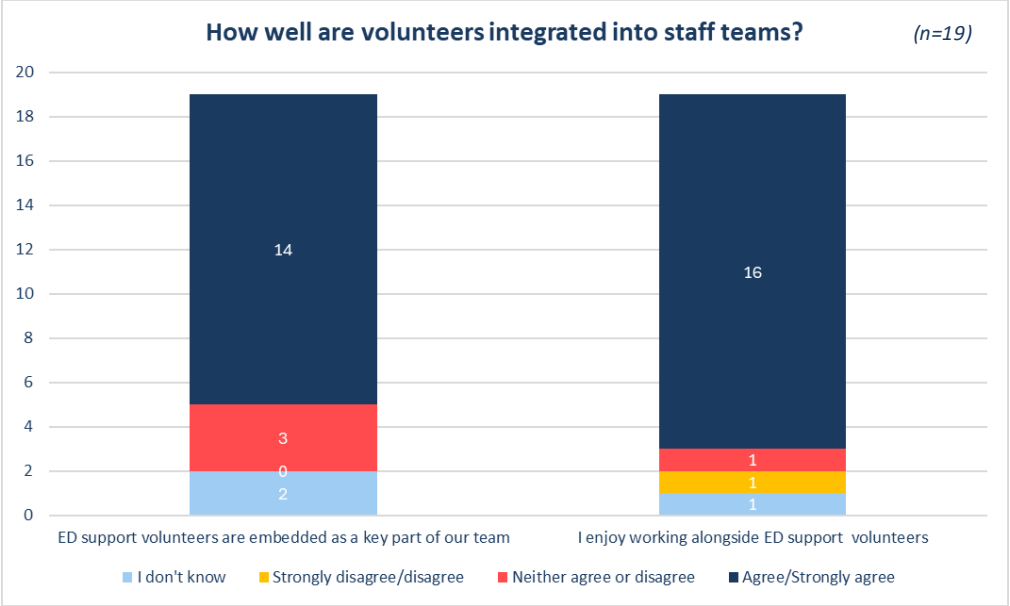
This feedback indicates that, for the majority of staff, they believe volunteers have a positive impact on their working lives overall.

² Of 19 staff respondents, 9 reported they work with volunteers regularly (on most shifts), 5 reported they work with volunteers at least once every other week, and 5 reported they work with volunteers occasionally (less than once a month).

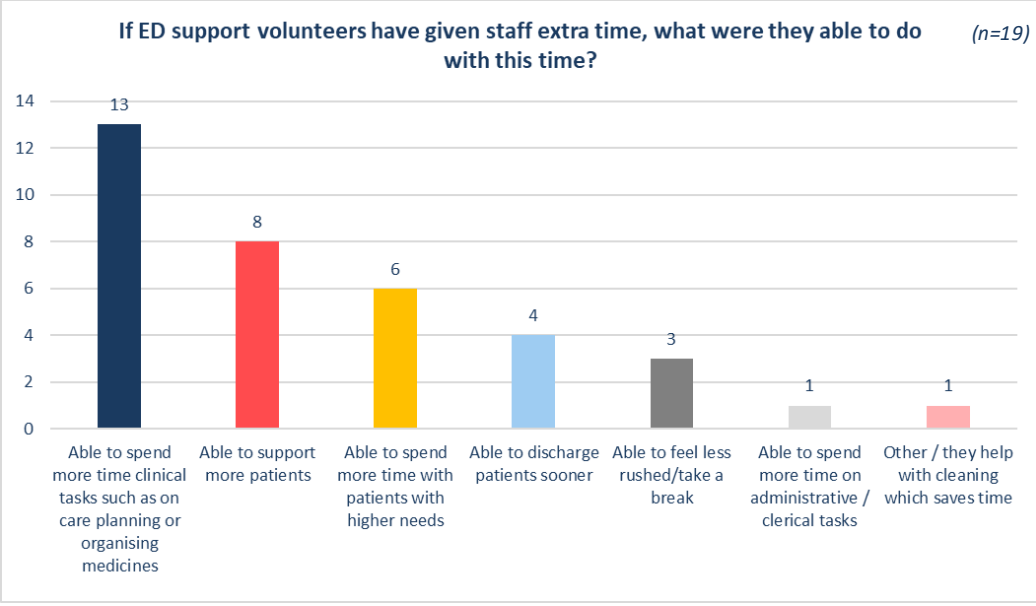
Impact: Integration and staff productivity



Staff members were asked to reflect on their experience of working alongside volunteers, including how well they were integrated into their teams and their perception of any impact volunteers had on their productivity.



- Of the 19 staff respondents, 16 stated they **enjoyed working with volunteers** and 14 felt that volunteers were **embedded as a key part of their team**.



- 15 of 19 staff members felt **volunteer support had freed up some time for them**.
- These individuals were asked what they were able to do with this additional time, with the majority reporting they were **able to spend more time on clinical tasks or spend more time with patients**.

Impact: Staff satisfaction



Staff members were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the volunteer support they had received. Overall, the feedback indicates positive staff perceptions of volunteers.

Of the 19 staff survey respondents:

- 18 reported having **positive experience with the ED volunteers**, and further 11 of those staff shared that their experience with the volunteers had been more positive than expected.
- All staff respondents were satisfied or very satisfied, suggesting **high levels of satisfaction with the volunteer support** they had received.

Staff members provided additional feedback....

 *"They are incredible. They feed patients and blanket them. So kind and cheerful and very much appreciate. Thank you to all volunteers especially those in ED. We love you."*
Staff member

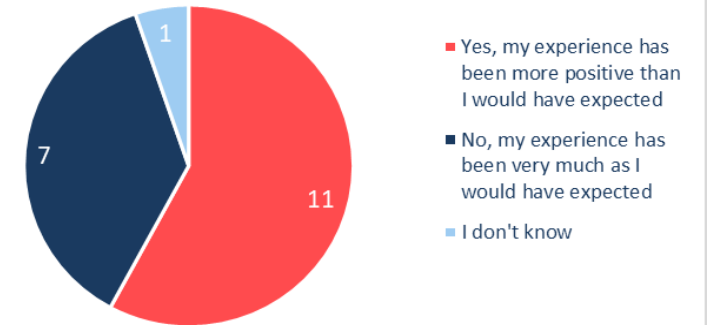
 *"Always intense pleasure to have [them] around."*
Staff member

 *"More ED support volunteers."*
Staff member

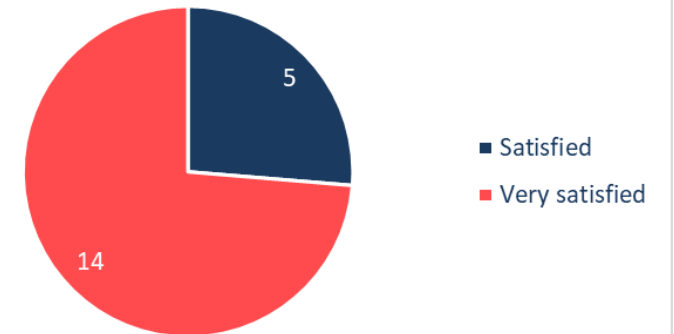
 *"Hoping that they will continue their support, we need them."*
Staff member

 *"They are doing an amazing job, and supporting the very busy ED staff. Their support and time they dedicate is greatly appreciated."*
Staff member

Have the recent interactions with ED volunteers altered staff views about impact volunteer can have? (n=19)



How satisfied staff are with the volunteer support overall? (n=19)



Impact: Staff member feedback

“If we rewind 5 years, the volunteering experience in ED has grown dramatically.

*An area that has been a focus for us is ensuring that our volunteers feel that they are part of our team and **they are such a hugely valued part of that team. Relationships between volunteers and staff are very strong and volunteers are trusted to expand the areas they service within the ED department, with prior consent from staff.***

An induction programme has been a focus for us in ensuring that all new volunteers have an induction not only with the volunteering team but with the Lead Nurse and Matron team in the department. A tour is provided of all areas and the standards are explained that we do expect from them but also how they can help us with certain tasks.

The interaction between volunteers, patients and their families frees up clinical time for staff. The volunteer team help us by interacting with our patients, providing a much needed ear when needed for our patients, cups of tea but also helping with our tasks such as cleaning and stocking.

Another area of support is directing around the department and the wider hospital, a recent new additional volunteering role has been developed called the 'ED welcomer', this has been created as a direct result of the growing need for volunteers within the main ED department. During Covid, the department had to change it's layout and gradually since then, improvements have been made to the Department, which is constantly evolving. This will continue to be developed with new initiatives such as the E triage system which again would benefit from the volunteer's input.

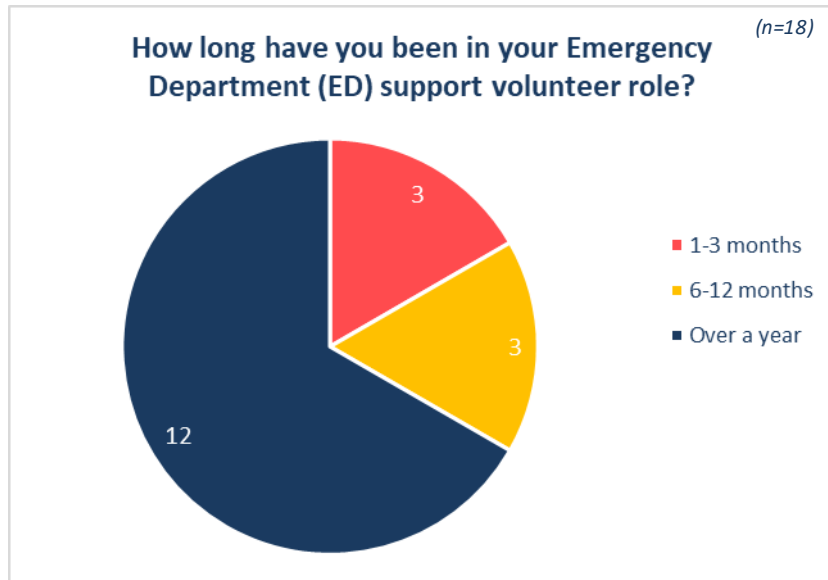
All the above contribute to the 100% retention of volunteering with the ED Department and the positive volunteering experience.”

Matron at Kingston Hospital Emergency Department

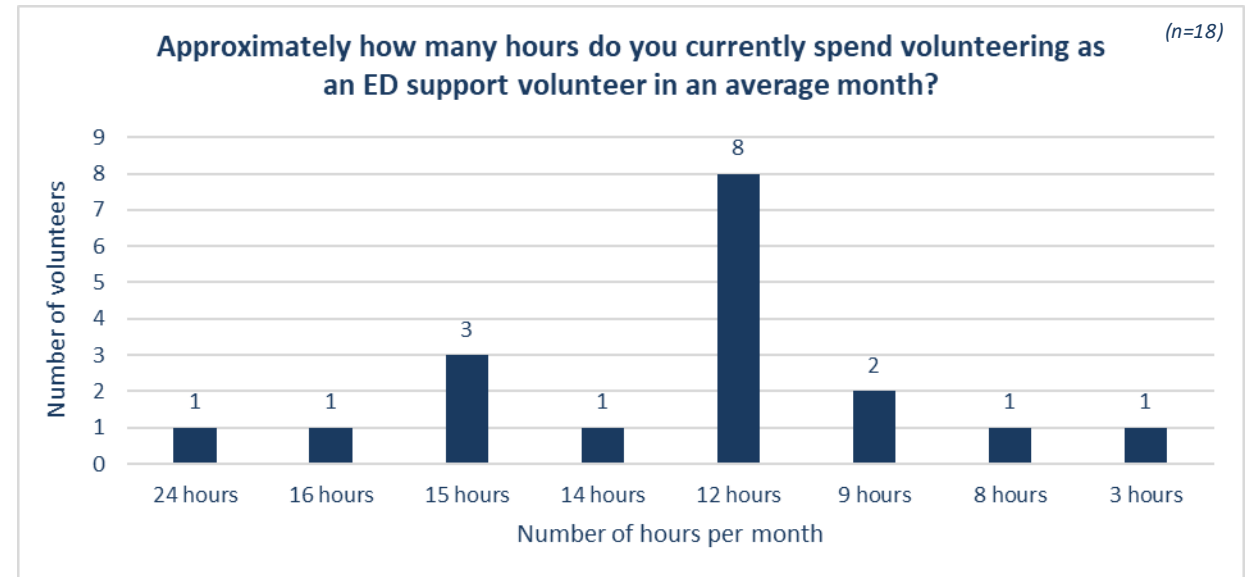


Insight: Volunteer support

18 volunteers completed the feedback survey after their experience in the ED volunteer role. They were asked about the duration and frequency of their volunteering...



- The volunteers had varying levels of experience in the ED role, but the majority had been **volunteering for over a year.**

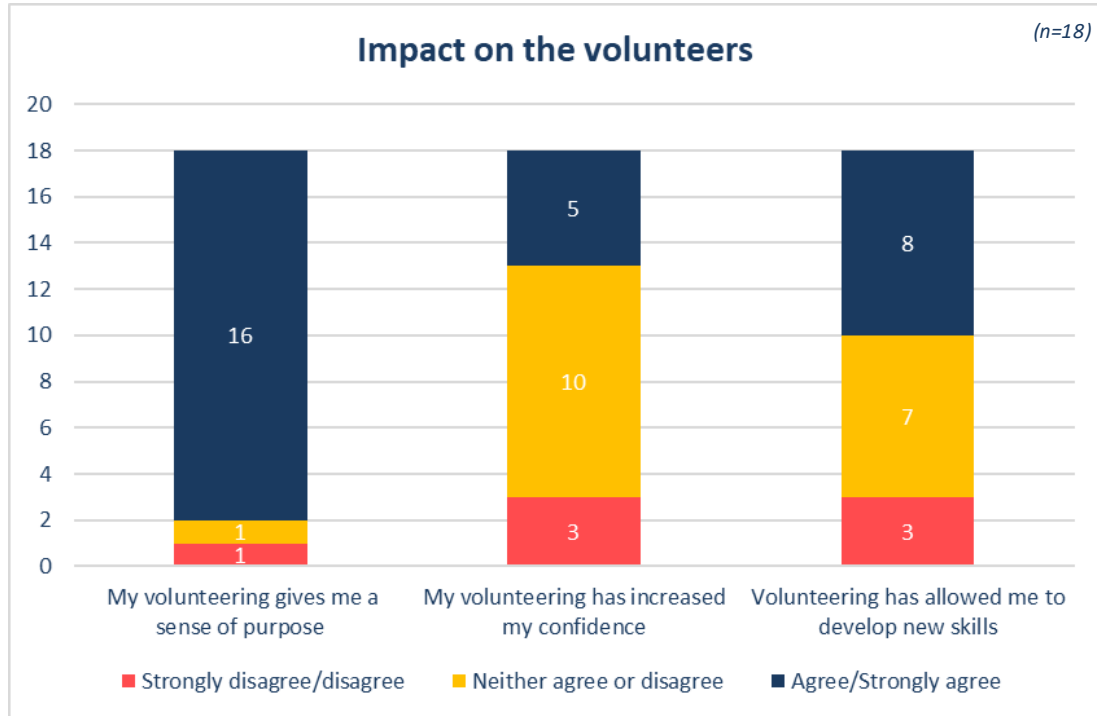


- They also reported different monthly volunteering hours per month, with the majority (8 out of 18 volunteers) averaging **12 hours of volunteering per month.**

Impact: Benefits for volunteers



Volunteers were requested to reflect on the difference volunteering has had for them as individuals. Findings indicate that for some volunteers there have been benefits to taking on their role.




- 16 of 18 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their **volunteering had given them a sense of purpose**. One volunteer stated...

 *"It is a privilege to support people in their hour of need. A&E is an anxious time for most of us so having the time to listen to people and comfort them is a source of reward."*

Volunteer

- 8 agreed or strongly agreed that their **volunteering has allowed them to develop new skills, while 7 volunteers reported being neutral**.
- 5 agreed or strongly agreed that their **volunteering had increased their confidence, while 10 volunteers reported being neutral**.

These volunteers did not provide any specific feedback as to why they did not feel they had gained confidence or new skills. However, there were some insights about a potential lack of feedback from staff members which may have impacted on feelings of personal development...

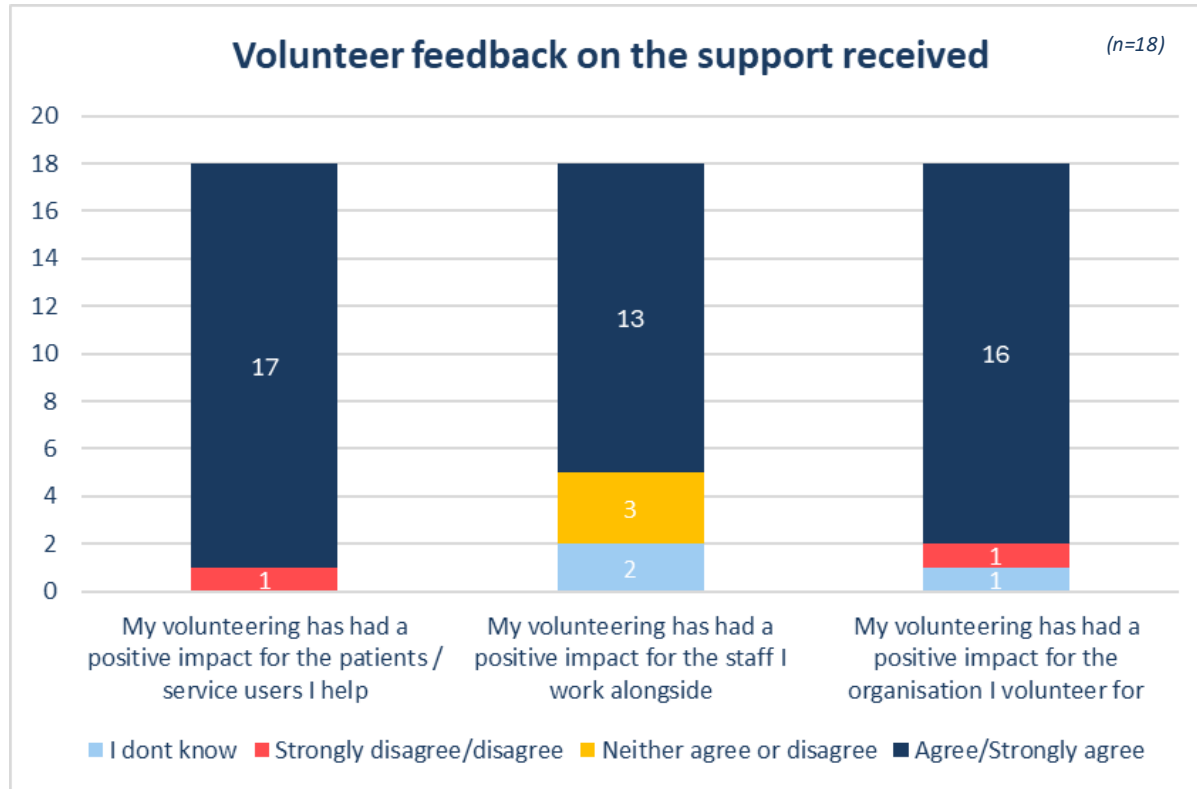
 *"Feedback on personal performance & any recommendations for volunteering improvements. Are what we are doing of benefit to the team? Should we be doing more/less/differently?"*

Volunteer

Impact: Perception of difference made to others



Volunteers were also asked to reflect upon the impact they felt their volunteering role had for the people they support. Overarching the findings demonstrate that volunteers do feel their role is making a difference to the people they support, patients in particular.



- 17 of 18 agreed or strongly agreed that their volunteering had a **positive impact for the patients they help**. One volunteer further elaborated...



"It has played a strong role as far as communicating with patients and I believe it has shown a huge benefit to them. This is the case especially where patients are worried or depressed with their lives and the benefit by even just talking."

Volunteer

- 16 of 18 agreed or strongly agreed that their volunteering had a **positive impact for the hospital they volunteer for**.
- Whilst the majority of volunteers (13 of 18) agreed that they had a **positive impact for the staff they work alongside**, five volunteers were either neutral, or didn't know. Again, this may be related to the insights volunteers provided on the previous slide, with request for more feedback from staff. One volunteer reported...



"I know my volunteering is having a positive impact on the staff I work alongside but staff are very busy, and most don't usually engage or give feedback. There are some exceptions however! Patients and relatives are often quick to tell me it's making a difference."

Volunteer

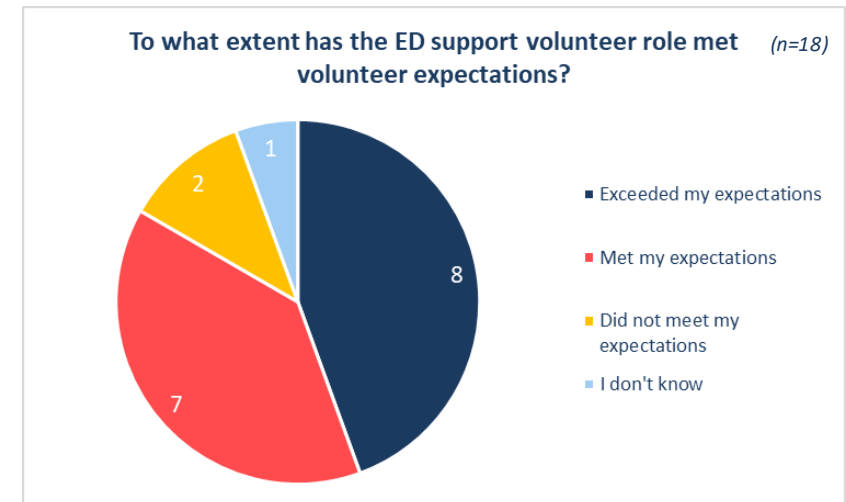
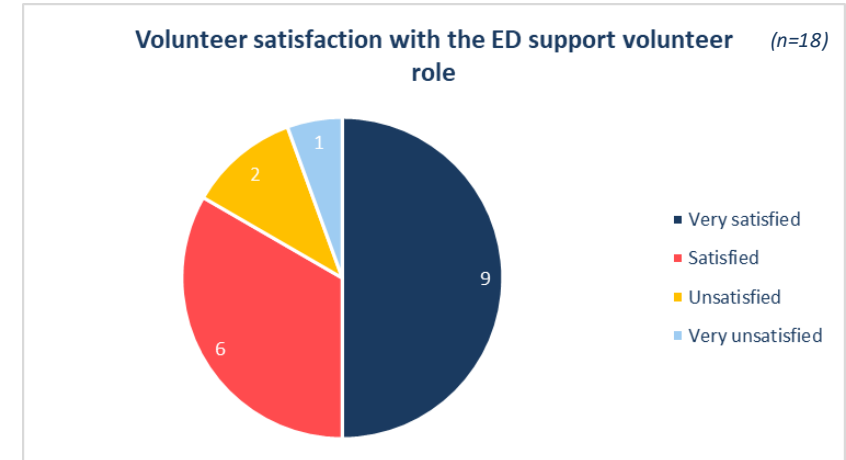
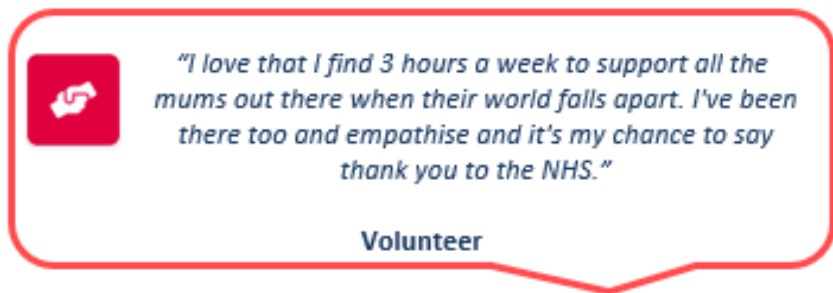
Impact: Volunteer satisfaction



And finally, volunteers were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with their volunteering experience.

- 15 volunteers were **satisfied or very satisfied with their volunteering experience.**
- Two volunteers **were unsatisfied** with their volunteering role. Both individuals provided further feedback regarding the available shift patterns, explaining, *“I want to work 6-9am and there is no slot to book”* and *“I’m sure that many people would like to volunteer in that 6-9am slot as it’s before work.”*
- Additionally, 15 volunteer shared that the **ED support volunteer role has either met or exceeded their expectations.** Two individuals reported that the role did not meet their expectations, and further explained *“There are not enough volunteers in ED”*.

One volunteers also provided some additional feedback on their experience...



Insight: Volunteer feedback

“When I first joined as a volunteer in the ED department it was in a shambles. We had little or no induction and no guidelines to work from or a mentor. The recruitment was shambolic and most of the volunteers were 6th form students looking to study medicine at University and needed work experience. These volunteers never showed up and the odd one that did was of little of no use - wouldn’t engage with staff or patients and just walked around majors in a daze.

*Things started to improve markedly once Sharon took over - **we had regular communication and volunteer events. We also built of a cadre of volunteers that were good, reliable and you would trust to do a decent job.***

One thing that has changed markedly since the start of my volunteering are the numbers of patients (load more), the numbers of staff (load less) and the pressure on the department. In the early days it was hard to fill three hours but now the department is so overloaded at times in can be overwhelming.”

Emergency Department Volunteer



Insight: Recommended improvements

Within their feedback, some respondents made recommendations to improve the ED volunteering role.

<h3>Shift times</h3>  <p>Two volunteers explained that the times of the shift can impact on their ability to help patients. They recommended this be taken into consideration when planning.</p>	<h3>Staff feedback</h3>  <p>Two volunteers requested that staff provide feedback to volunteers, particularly focusing on their personal performance and any recommendations for volunteering improvements.</p>
<h3>Additional training</h3>  <p>One volunteer requested additional training to better support their role in delivering volunteer services in the ED, with a specific focus on handling mental health crises and safeguarding.</p>	<h3>Requested information from volunteers</h3>  <p>One family member suggested that volunteers could provide information on the results to some extent if they were able to, as waiting without knowing can be difficult.</p>

Conclusions and recommendations

ED volunteers have made a significant contribution to Kingston Hospital NHS Foundation Trust - since the volunteers have been in post, they have contributed hundreds of hours of support, resulting in thousands of staff and patient interactions. Emerging findings suggest that this support has resulted in positive outcomes for patients' and family members/carer's emotional wellbeing and hospital experience.

Staff perceptions of volunteers were positive overall, with many reporting that volunteers had helped them with productivity and improved their working lives. Further, all staff respondents were satisfied or very satisfied, suggesting high levels of satisfaction with the volunteer support they had received. Additionally, volunteers appear to have been well integrated into the organisation, with many staff members and volunteers reflecting that they felt volunteers were part of their team.

The majority volunteers appear to have enjoyed their volunteering experience and felt that their role had a positive impact for patients in particular. Evidence also suggests that additional benefits had been achieved for volunteers, including an increased sense of purpose and confidence. However, some volunteers made suggestions to enhance their volunteering experience in the ED. **Consideration of creating available slots to accommodate more volunteers, providing mechanisms to gain staff feedback, and providing them with additional training to support volunteers' personal development are recommended.**

In an often stressful and fast-paced environment, ED volunteers provides excellent example of where volunteers can make a positive difference to the wellbeing and experience of staff, patients and family members within the NHS.

Acknowledgements

Helpforce would like to pass on our thanks to **Kingston Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust**, and in particular to Sharon McEwan, Deputy Head of Volunteering, and Volunteering Experience Coordinators, Giedre Howell and Nikki Davies. We also share our appreciation to the patients, family/carers, staff and volunteers who participated in providing their feedback.

Research limitations

Due to the nature of the volunteering role, collecting data in the emergency department can prove to be challenging. This is due to the fast-paced nature of the department and the fact that attending ED can be a stressful or emotional time for patients and family/carers.

Kingston ED was successful in gathering some patient feedback and including patient outcomes in the evaluation, something which can be considered an achievement given the challenges highlighted.

Response numbers are thought to be representative of both volunteers and staff working within the department, but patient and family/carer responses are unlikely to be representative of the high volumes of individuals who seek support from the department. Therefore, while these findings are promising, there are limitations to the strength of the conclusions this evaluation can draw, and the findings should not be attributed to a wider population.

helpforce

Thank you

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