

# Volunteer Drivers Evaluation Report

North Tees & Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust

June 2024

*helpforce*



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# Executive summary

## The project

North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust's volunteer drivers provide transportation for patients to get to and from outpatient appointments and to get home after an inpatient discharge. They also provide delivery and collection of medications and equipment to patients at home.

## Key findings

- The well-established volunteer drivers service is supporting large volumes of patients each year, delivered at an estimated 60% of the cost of outsourcing the same journeys to taxis. This translates to an estimated cost saving of £200k since the service began.
- Both patients and staff report very positive experiences with the drivers. Patients feel that the service had helped to reduce their anxiety alongside providing them with practical support. Benefits for staff members include helping to increase the quality of care they provide and increasing their confidence about patients being able to get to and from hospital and having the equipment and medication they need at home.
- Volunteers report being happy, well supported and well trained in their role, and agree that their volunteering is having a positive impact for patients, staff and the organisation.

## Conclusions & recommendations

This evaluation shows that the volunteer drivers service has become an integral part of the Trust, being very well regarded by patients and staff, delivering demonstrable benefits to the organisation, and offering the volunteers themselves purpose and satisfaction. The Trust should continue to maintain the excellent service that has been established and consider action in line with some helpful constructive comments which could further improve the experience of all beneficiaries.

## Evaluation approach

The evaluation gathered feedback from key beneficiaries via surveys: patients (50 responses), staff (36) and volunteers (19). Data on the number of volunteer driver jobs, mileage recorded and mileage expenses paid was provided by the Trust.



*A selection of outcomes evidenced by this evaluation.*

# Service overview

- The volunteer drivers service at North Tees & Hartlepool NHS Trust was introduced in 2013. That year, there were eight active volunteers providing free transportation to support patients getting to and from their outpatient appointments.
- The service has grown since then, both in size and scope. There are now 27 active volunteers and, alongside providing transport for outpatient appointments, they also:
  - take patients home on discharge from an inpatient stay;
  - collect and deliver medication and orthotics equipment to patients' homes; and
  - collect orthotics equipment from patients' homes when it is no longer needed to enable it to be re-used by the department.
- The hospital switchboard has a booking service, allowing patients to request volunteer transport for appointments and discharge lounge staff to request patient transportation home. The drivers attend the pharmacy at each hospital site every day and the orthotics department twice weekly, making any deliveries as required. The volunteers use their own vehicles and claim mileage expenses from the Trust.
- In May 2023, the volunteer drivers won one of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Mayor's Civic Awards, which 'honour local people and organisations or businesses that have made a real difference to our community and officially recognise the achievements that have been made'. The team won the 'Service to the Community Award' for groups and organisations.
- The service was previously part of the [Helpforce Volunteer Innovators Programme \(VIP\)](#), the aim of which was to develop and assess impactful volunteer innovations that could be refined and shared with other UK Trusts looking to adopt effective volunteer services. The project at North Tees & Hartlepool sought to scale the existing volunteer driver service and provide up to 28 days of volunteer support to those who needed it after discharge.
  - This addition to the service has continued since the pilot, with all patients who use the drivers service at discharge considered for ongoing support. This support is delivered by separate Discharge Support Volunteers.



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



Please note that the original outcome model included organisational outcomes of reduced DNAs, reduced discharge delays and reduced bed days, and a staff outcome of increased efficiencies as a result of these organisational outcomes. Due to the length of time the volunteer role has been in existence, it was not possible to obtain hospital data going back to before 2013 to allow us to evidence these outcomes. Therefore, they have been removed from the final outcome model.

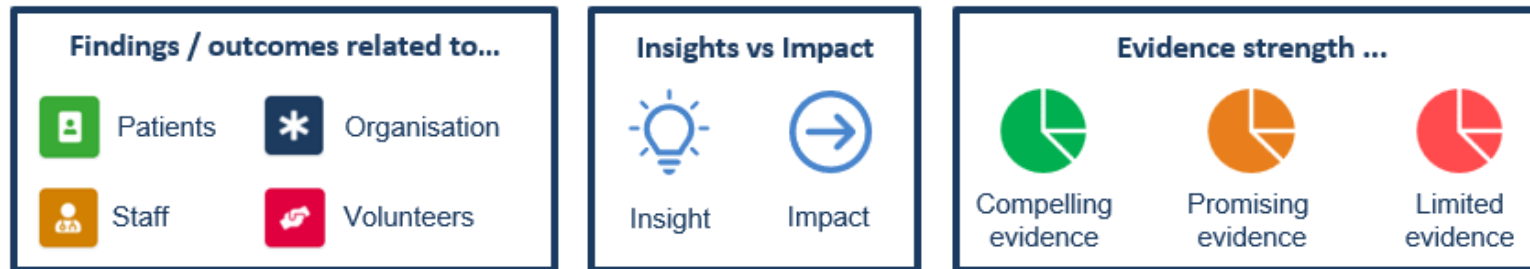
# Evaluation approach: Methodology

The evaluation consisted of four different data collection methods:

- Activity tracking of the number of driver jobs completed, mileage logged, and expenses paid since role inception, provided by the Trust.
- A patient survey, completed after a journey with a driver, to understand their experience and what they would have done without the support.
- A staff survey to understand their experience, the volunteer drivers' impact on them and perceived impact on patients. The survey was completed by staff who work alongside the drivers, for example in outpatients, the discharge lounge, pharmacy and orthotics.
- A volunteer survey to understand the impact they feel they are having in their role, on themselves, patients, staff and the organisation.



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 using icons. These icons are as follows...

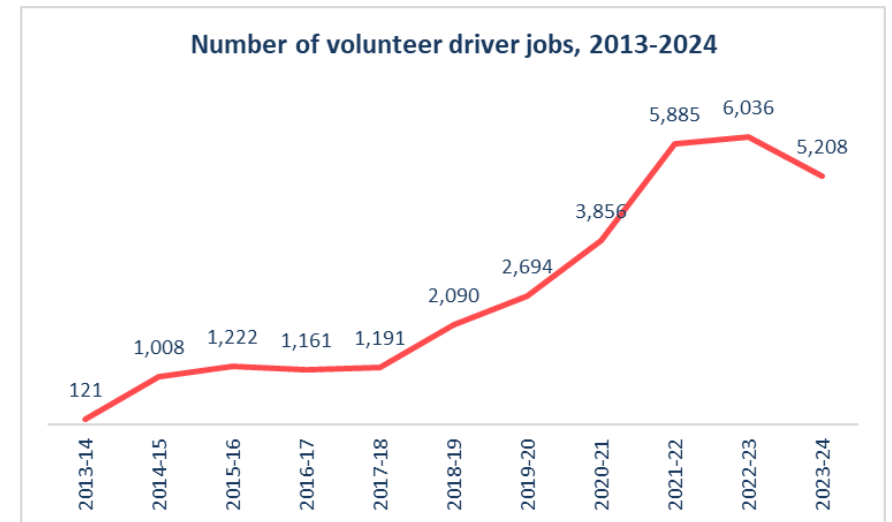
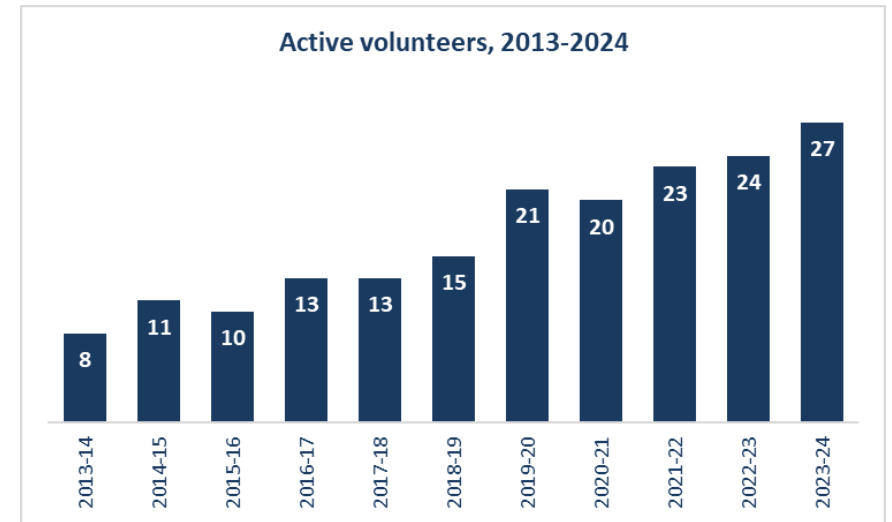


Please note that most chart labels representing only one respondent have been removed to aid the readability of the chart.



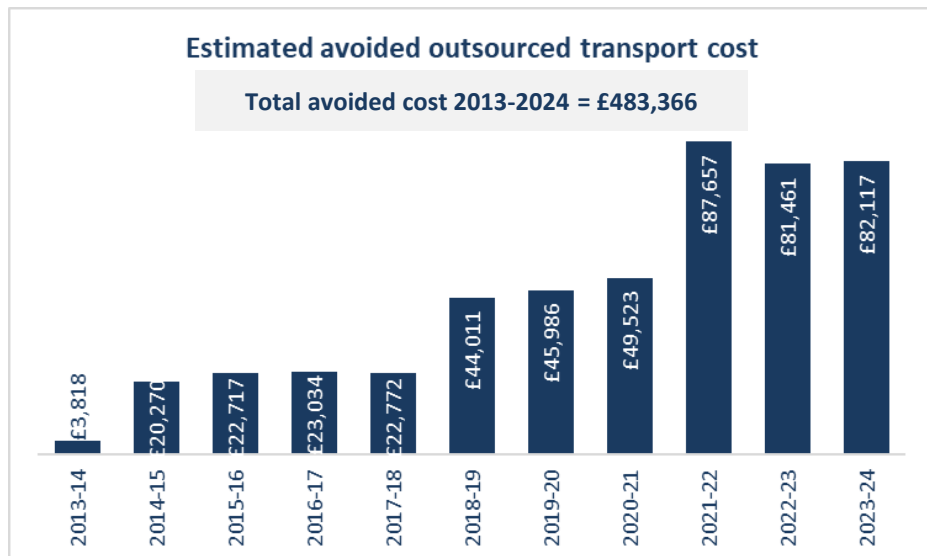
# Insight: Volunteer activity

- Since the launch of the volunteer drivers service in 2013, the number of active volunteers has been on an upward trend towards a peak of 27 in 2023-24.
- In line with this, the number of jobs the drivers have undertaken has grown over time, peaking at just over 6k in 2022-23 before falling back slightly the following year.
- Continued growth was seen in 2020-21 despite the COVID-19 pandemic: although there were a reduced number of outpatient appointments, the drivers continued to support discharged patients, transport patients to urgent appointments and deliver medication and equipment after virtual appointments.
- In total, the volunteers have completed 30,472 jobs and logged 619,796 miles in journeys since the service was launched.
- The volunteers who provided feedback for this evaluation appear highly engaged and long-standing:
  - All had been in their role for at least a year, with most for 3-5 years. One had been in post for 10 years.
  - 17 of 19 were volunteering on a weekly basis, seven of those at least twice a week.
  - Each volunteer was spending an average of 25 hours volunteering per month.





# Impact: Transport cost savings



  
**£200,453**  
estimated cost saving to the  
Trust of volunteer drivers vs  
outsourcing to local taxis

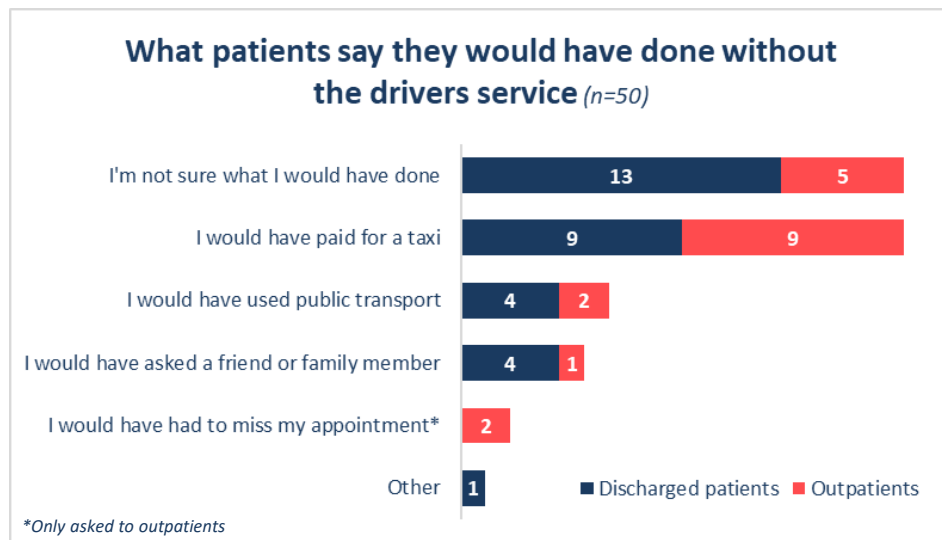
- It is estimated that the volunteer drivers have enabled the Trust to avoid £483k in outsourced transport costs to date by not having to use taxis for the journeys the drivers completed.
- A marked increase was seen in 2021-22, and in the last three years it has consistently been above £80k each year.
- The volunteer drivers service still comes at a cost to the Trust, as volunteers have their mileage costs paid. However, even when this cost is taken into account, it equates to an overall estimated saving for the Trust of just over £200k since the service's inception.
- This means that the Trust is able to provide transportation and deliveries for patients at around 60% of the cost of outsourcing the journeys to taxis.
- Additionally, some patients show their gratitude for the drivers service by providing donations. A total of £13.8k has been received to date, which is given directly to the Trust's general fund.

Details of the approach to estimating financial impact can be found on the [final page](#) of this report.





# Impact: Effect on patients



  
**49 of 50**  
patients agreed or strongly agreed that being able to use the volunteer drivers service helped them to feel less anxious about getting to/from hospital

- Patients were asked what they would have done if the drivers service wasn't available. 18 of 50 patients said that they just weren't sure what they would have done, illustrating how valuable the service is for those patients who may be left without an alternative. The same number said that they would have had to pay for a taxi themselves, with a higher proportion of outpatients selecting this response, whose cumulative taxi costs may be high if they have frequent appointments.
- Two of the 19 outpatients surveyed said that they would have had to miss their appointment, implying that the service may be helping to prevent missed or delayed appointments.
- 49 of 50 patients agreed or strongly agreed that being able to use the drivers service helped them to feel less anxious, either about getting home after discharge or about getting to/from an appointment. In fact, 43 of 50 strongly agreed with the statement. This shows that the service is having a positive impact on patient wellbeing alongside providing them with practical support.

# Impact: Patient satisfaction



All surveyed patients were satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received from the volunteer drivers



46 of 50 were very satisfied

*"Coming for chemotherapy can be stressful. The drivers are so friendly and put my mind at ease. I worry about transport and this service is the best."*

**Outpatient**

*"The drivers do an amazing job. Always organised, reassuring and helpful. I don't know what I'd do without them."*

**Outpatient**

*"During a very anxious time, [the volunteer] has been amazing. So friendly, reliable and always goes out of his way to make sure I got to and from appointments and always cheers you up with his friendly smile. [He] is a credit to the service."*

**Outpatient**

*"[The volunteer] was fantastic. I don't know how I would have managed getting home without a volunteer driver."*

**Discharged patient**

*"My mobility was not good, so it helped me no end."*

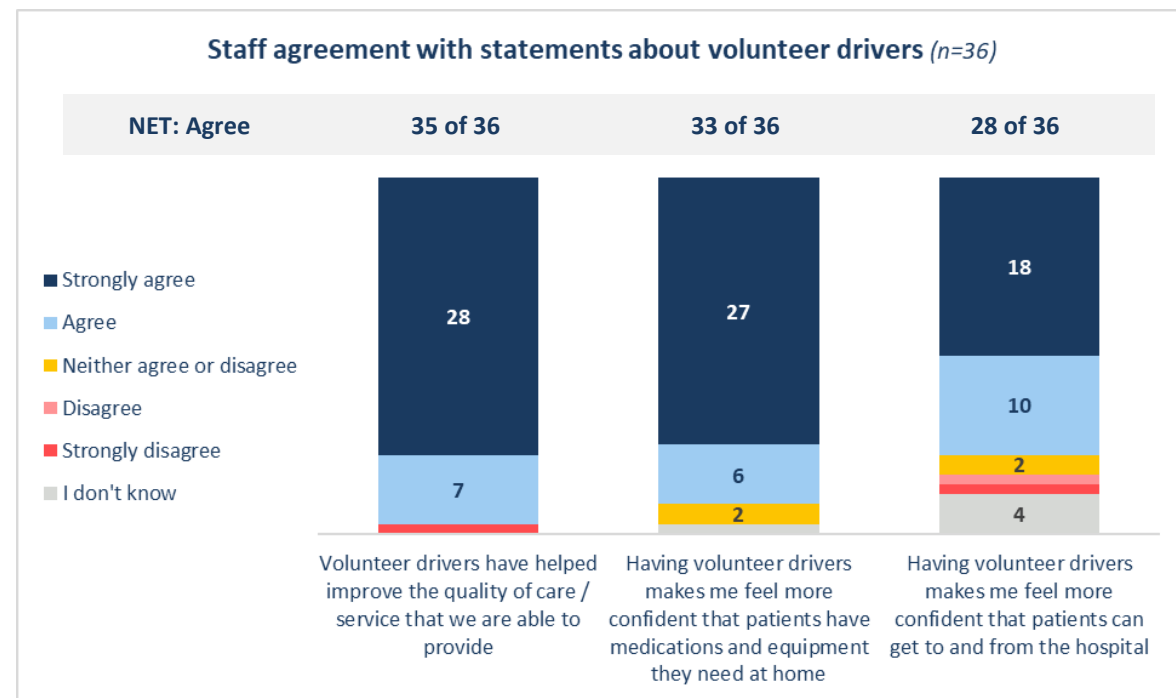
**Discharged patient**



# Impact: Staff perceptions

Staff were asked about the impact they feel the drivers are having on them and their patients.

- Almost all surveyed staff members agreed that the volunteer drivers have helped to improve the quality of service provided to patients. One staff member reported that the team have been able to act on safeguarding concerns thanks to valuable information the volunteers provided.
- The majority of staff also agreed or strongly agreed that the drivers make them feel more confident that patients have medications and equipment they require. This was reflected in staff members' comments who mentioned driver deliveries supporting patients who would otherwise struggle to collect items and helping to prevent delays in care.
- While slightly lower than the other statements, there was still a strong level of staff agreement that drivers make them feel more confident that patients can get to and from the hospital. The staff members who provided a neutral, negative or undecided response at this question still provided positive responses about their overall experience. Most of them were orthotics and pharmacy staff who will mainly have interacted with the drivers about deliveries rather than patient transport.



*"Thank you very much for the support they give to our service. Our delivery of care is enhanced with volunteer drivers."*

**Outpatients staff member**

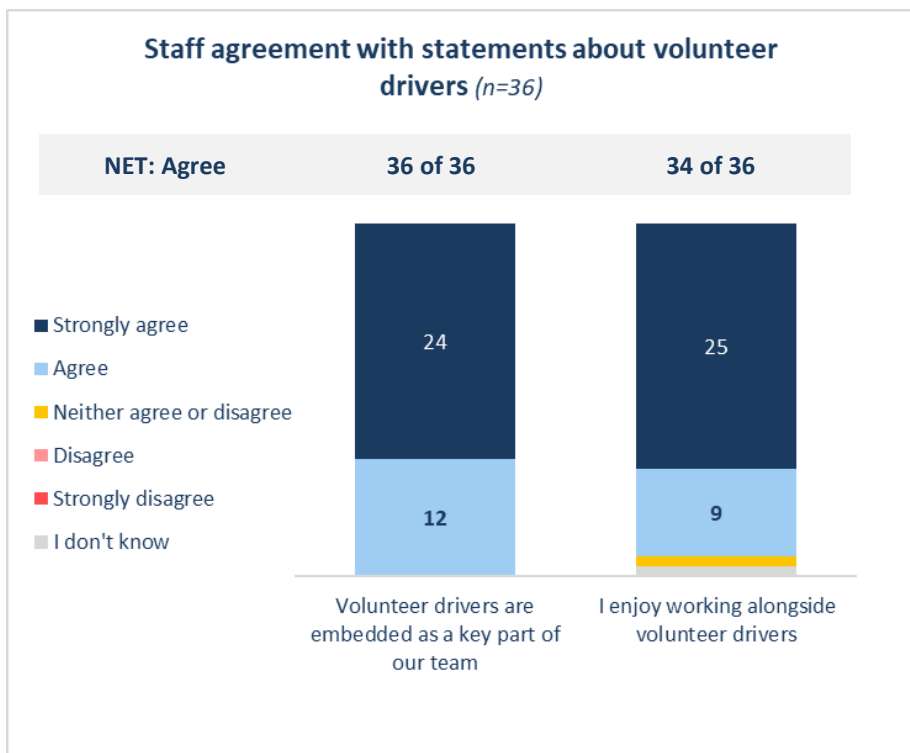
*"The Orthotic Volunteer driver service has been an amazing addition to the service and has prevented delays to patient care and allowed prescriptions to be delivered to those patients who struggle to attend their appointments."*

**Orthotics staff member**



# Impact: Staff perceptions

- From the staff members' perspective, there appears to be very good integration between themselves and the volunteer drivers. All staff surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that the drivers are embedded as a key part of their team. Additionally, the vast majority (34 of 36) agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoy working alongside volunteer drivers.
- Comments from staff members reflect this sentiment, with a number stating that the volunteers feel like part of the team.



*"The volunteer drivers are wonderful, kind respectful people who always bring a smile to the team when they arrive. They provide a wonderful service for our patients and are very well-respected additions to our team."*

**Orthotics staff member**

*"They are all valued members of the hospital community and we would be lost without these generous men!"*

**Outpatients staff member**

- Discussions with the volunteering staff team show that they have actively tried to integrate the drivers service into business as usual by continually looking at how they support hospital activities, including:
  - Encouraging drivers to reach out to staff and visiting the discharge lounge and ward areas.
  - Inviting staff to attend volunteer drivers' meetings to present service activities and any changes which may impact on the drivers.
  - Arranging regular meetings with staff groups to explore potential improvements and understand each other's roles more fully.
  - Developing an understanding with ward areas that the service will try to accommodate urgent requests for support which wouldn't fit the usual remit of the drivers service. For example, a driver was able to take the partner of an end-of-life patient to and from the hospital at the request of the ward, as the partner would otherwise have been unable to visit.

# Impact: Staff satisfaction

Staff members' experience with the volunteer drivers appears to have been overwhelmingly positive.



**36 of 36** staff were **satisfied or very satisfied** with their experience



**20 of 36** were **very satisfied**



**35 of 36** staff were **somewhat or very likely** to recommend the volunteer drivers to colleagues



**34 of 36** were **very likely** to recommend



**33 of 36** staff said their experience **was more positive than or as they expected**



**20 of 36** said it was **more positive**

*"The volunteer drivers are wonderful, kind respectful people who always bring a smile to the team when they arrive. They provide a wonderful service for our patients and are very well respected additions to our team."*

**Orthotics staff member**

*"The volunteer drivers that cover our service are amazing. They are very friendly & helpful and go above and beyond for patients."*

**Orthotics staff member**

There were only a handful of constructive comments from staff members:

- It isn't always clear if a driver is available and until what time.
- It isn't always clear what the drivers can support with.
- There can be variation in what the drivers are happy to deliver.



# Impact: Support for volunteers

Volunteers were asked about the impact their role has had on them and others, and about the support they have received.

- The volunteers appear to feel well supported in their role, with the majority agreeing or strongly agreeing that they receive enough support from the volunteer team and from other members of staff. However, they were more likely to strongly agree that they received enough support from the volunteer team than other staff.
- Most volunteers also agreed or strongly agreed that they received enough training to undertake their role. Volunteers were asked if there were any areas where they would appreciate further training. There were only a few suggestions:
  - Understanding the role of ward clerks and different nurses on wards.
  - First aid.
  - How to handle conversations, e.g. empathy for people who have been given bad news.



*"Voluntary services staff are warm, friendly and very helpful. Always there to support you. Hospital staff treat us with respect and friendships have built up."*

**Volunteer driver**



# Impact: Perception of difference made

- Volunteers reported that they feel they are having a positive impact on others in their role, with the majority agreeing or strongly agreeing that their volunteering positively impacts on patients, the organisation and staff.
- The strongest agreement was with having a positive impact on patients, with some commenting that this gives them a great sense of fulfilment / pride. The least strong agreement was with having a positive impact on staff. One volunteer commented that they aren't sure if all staff are aware of the volunteer drivers, and another noted inconsistencies in relationships with different departments.

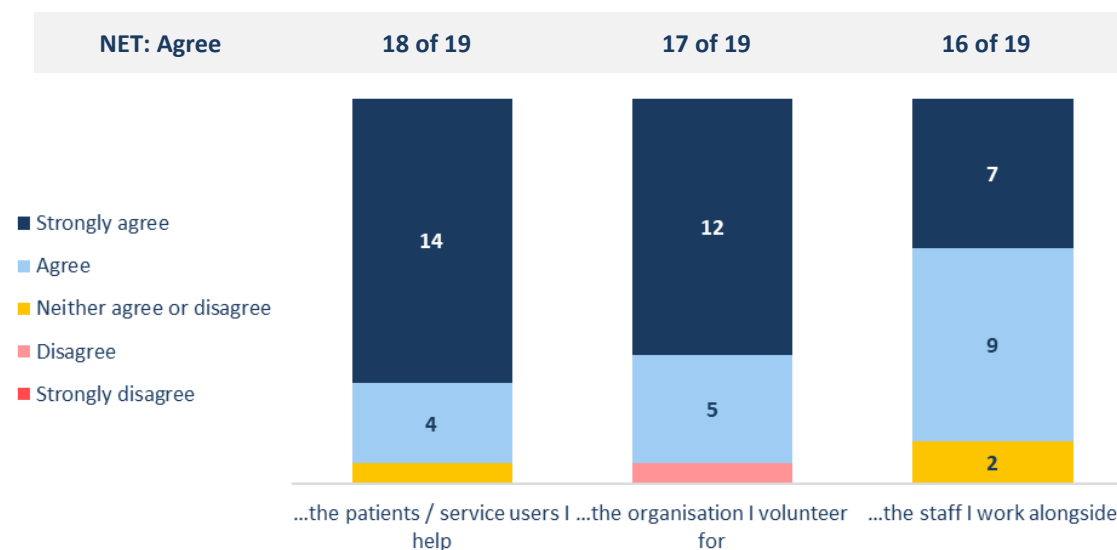
*"Sense of pride when representing the Trust and providing a service for patients, especially those with transport issues."*

**Volunteer driver**

*"In some wards/departments we are taken for granted but in different wards we are made most welcome, staff take the time to learn and remember our names."*

**Volunteer driver**

Volunteer agreement - 'My volunteering has a positive impact for...' (n=19)





# Impact: Benefits for volunteers

- When asked about the impact volunteering has had on themselves, most volunteers agreed or strongly agreed that their role gives them a sense of purpose.
- However, lower levels of agreement were seen with volunteering allowing them to gain new skills and increasing their confidence.
  - Despite this, no negative comments were given by volunteers relating to either of these measures.
  - The majority of volunteers who responded neutrally or disagreed with these statements generally provided positive feedback on their role, so this may not have been an expected or desired outcome from their volunteering.

*"Helping/meeting patients and staff gives me a real feeling of fulfilment."*

**Volunteer driver**

*"Always have a sense of purpose and good feeling of a worthwhile job well done."*

**Volunteer driver**

Volunteer agreement about impact on themselves (n=19)







# Impact: Volunteer satisfaction



- Overall, the volunteers reported having a positive experience in their role. The majority reported that the role had met or exceeded their expectations, with 8 of 19 stating it had exceeded them.
- The majority also reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their role, with most (12 of 19) stating that they were very satisfied.
- One volunteer reported being unsatisfied and the role not having met their expectations. They provided feedback to support their responses: *“System is increasingly being abused by NHS staff and patients who expect some sort of personal chauffeur/carer/porter for what is a simple driver role. Process is not properly followed by NHS staff and certain volunteer drivers putting undue pressure on those that follow the rules.”*
- While one volunteer reported being ‘very unsatisfied’ with their role, they provided positive responses to other questions so it is possible this was selected in error. In fact, they commented that they *“get great satisfaction in seeing a smile from my patients”*.
- While feedback was in the main very positive, some volunteers provided constructive feedback, including that they:
  - Would like there to be more volunteer drivers due to sometimes feeling short-handed.
  - Have sometimes felt under pressure to do more because they find it hard to refuse.
  - Would find it helpful to have a folder of guidelines in the drivers’ room of what the Trust can expect them to do as a driver.

# Conclusions and recommendations

## Conclusions

- North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust's volunteer drivers service is very well established, with at least 5k transport, collection or delivery journeys completed in each of the last three years. As a result, the service has delivered an estimated £200k in cost savings since its inception by the Trust not outsourcing the journeys to taxis.
- Patient satisfaction with their experience is high. A sizeable number of patients reported that they don't know what they would have done without the service. The volunteers also help to support patient wellbeing alongside giving practical support, with patients agreeing that the support helped them to feel less anxious about getting to/from hospital.
- Staff feedback about their experience is also extremely positive. They report that the volunteer drivers have helped to improve the quality of care provided to patients and increased their confidence in patients having medications and equipment they need and being able to get to/from hospital. Constructive comments from staff included that it isn't always clear when a driver is available and that there are tasks that some volunteers are less happy to support with.
- Volunteers appear to feel happy, well supported and well trained in their role, with only minimal suggestions for further desired training. Most agree that they are having a positive impact on the people they support, most strongly patients, and that their role gives them a sense of purpose. Constructive feedback from volunteers included them sometimes feeling short-handed / under pressure to do more and that they would find it helpful to have guidelines of what they can support with.
- Staff members feel that there is good integration between themselves and the volunteers, but some comments from volunteers indicate this can be more variable from their perspective and were less likely to strongly agree that they have a positive impact on the staff they work alongside than on patients or the organisation as a whole.

## Recommendations

- To continue to maintain the excellent volunteer drivers service, including delivering good support to volunteers and considering whether there is scope for recruitment of further volunteer drivers. Explore opportunities to offer further training to volunteers where it is desired, in line with their suggestions.
- To share findings from this report with the volunteers, to make them aware of the impact they're having, particularly the positive feedback from staff members.
- To act on constructive feedback from staff and volunteers. Some suggested considerations include:
  - How to make it clear what's in scope for volunteers to support with to help manage expectations of both volunteers and staff.
  - Reviewing / communicating processes for staff to know if/when a volunteer driver is available.

# Financial impact approach

The estimated avoided outsourced transport costs were calculated using:

- Volunteer mileage records (the mileage was halved for the purposes of the calculations: a taxi would only charge for a one-way journey to the patient's home, whereas volunteers would also be claiming for their return journey to the hospital).
- Stockton-on-Tees local authority hackney carriage tariff:
  - Tariff 1 for standard fares (the least costly fare) was used in all cases. The tariff charged is dependent on the day and time of the journey, which was information we did not have for each journey.
  - For 2013/14 to 2021/22, the tariff used was £2.50 first half mile, 10p each following 136 yards or part. Tariff taken from page 7 in [Darlington Borough Council's consultation of variation to Hackney carriage fares](#) (accessed April 2024).
  - For 2022/23 onwards, the tariff used was £3.50 first half mile or part, 10p each following 120 yards or part. Tariff taken from [Stockton-on-Tees borough council website](#) (accessed April 2024). While it was not possible to find a specific date that the tariff changed, it appears to have been in June 2022, early in the financial year.

The approach was checked by a representative of the finance team at the Trust before the writing of this report.

## Acknowledgements

Helpforce would like to give our thanks to North Tees & Hartlepool NHS Trust, particularly to Paul Wharton (Head of Volunteering) and Lindsay Rutherford-Hoe (Volunteer Coordinator) for their engagement and support in the evaluation and data collection process. We also extend our appreciation to the patients, staff members and volunteers who gave their time to provide feedback.

# helpforce

## Thank you

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