

Ward Helper Volunteers Evaluation Report

Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust

September 2023

helpforce



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Executive summary

The project

Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust (SCFT) designed and delivered a 6-month ward helper volunteering role between Spring 2023 to Autumn 2023. The service involved volunteers providing companionship and activity engagement to support in their intermediate care beds (ICU), helping patients to feel involved, engaged and promote their wellbeing.

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 whilst in hospital, as well as their overall experience. Staff also expressed that they were satisfied with the support they received from volunteers. Additionally, 17 staff members agreed volunteers helped to improve the quality of care provided.

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

Conclusions

The findings from the evaluation of the ward helper volunteering project demonstrate the positive impact of volunteer involvement in the hospital setting. Emerging findings suggest that ward role has measurable benefits for patients, staff and the volunteers themselves. Additionally, volunteers appear to have been well integrated into the organisation.



Service Overview

- Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust (SCFT) are the main provider of community NHS health and care across Brighton and Hove, East Sussex, High Weald Lewes and Havens and West Sussex, providing essential medical, nursing and therapeutic care to adults, children and families.
- SCFT's aim is to give people choice about the care they receive and provide certainty that when they need the Trust, wherever they are, that they will meet their needs with services of a high quality that are safe, effective and compassionate, and that are offered with respect.¹
- To aid patient recovery and to help provide a positive experience whilst at hospital, the SCFT volunteering team recruited volunteers to provide companionship and support to patients within Intermediate Care Units.
- Volunteers provided therapeutic activities, company and conversation, as well as supporting them with practical tasks such as making phone calls.
- At the time of the evaluation, there were **72 active volunteers** within the ward helper role. Volunteers reported that they volunteer on a semi-regular basis. Some individuals reported volunteering more frequently.
- The majority of **staff reported that they had worked with volunteers at least once every other week.**²

¹ Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust, "About us", [About us \(sussexcommunity.nhs.uk\)](https://www.sussexcommunity.nhs.uk)

² Of 20 staff respondents, 8 reported they work with volunteers regularly (at least once every other week), 1 reported they work with volunteers at least once a week, and 4 reported they work with volunteers routinely (on most shifts).

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 Ward Helper volunteer project at Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust was completed using data captured from patients, volunteers and staff members . We were looking to answer the following questions about the project:

- What different have volunteers made to the patients' hospital experience?
- What impact have ward helper volunteer had on staff perceptions towards volunteering?
- What impact has volunteering had for the volunteers themselves?

The ward helper volunteering role aims to achieve a multitude of positive **patient, volunteers and staff outcomes**.



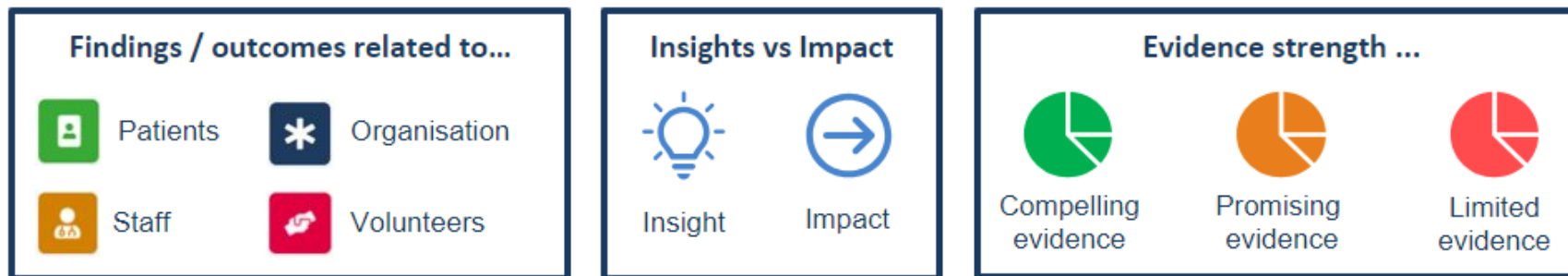
Evaluation approach: Methodology

The evaluation consisted of three different collection methods:

- **Patient surveys** completed following their interaction with ward helper volunteers, asking questions regarding their experience of receiving support and outcomes achieved.
- **Volunteer surveys** completed by volunteers after delivering the role for a minimum of four weeks, asking questions regarding their volunteer experience and perceived role impact.
- **Staff surveys** completed as a one-off snapshot survey, asking questions about their experience of working alongside volunteers.



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.



Throughout the report, chart labels under 4% or 4 responses have been removed to aid the readability of the chart.

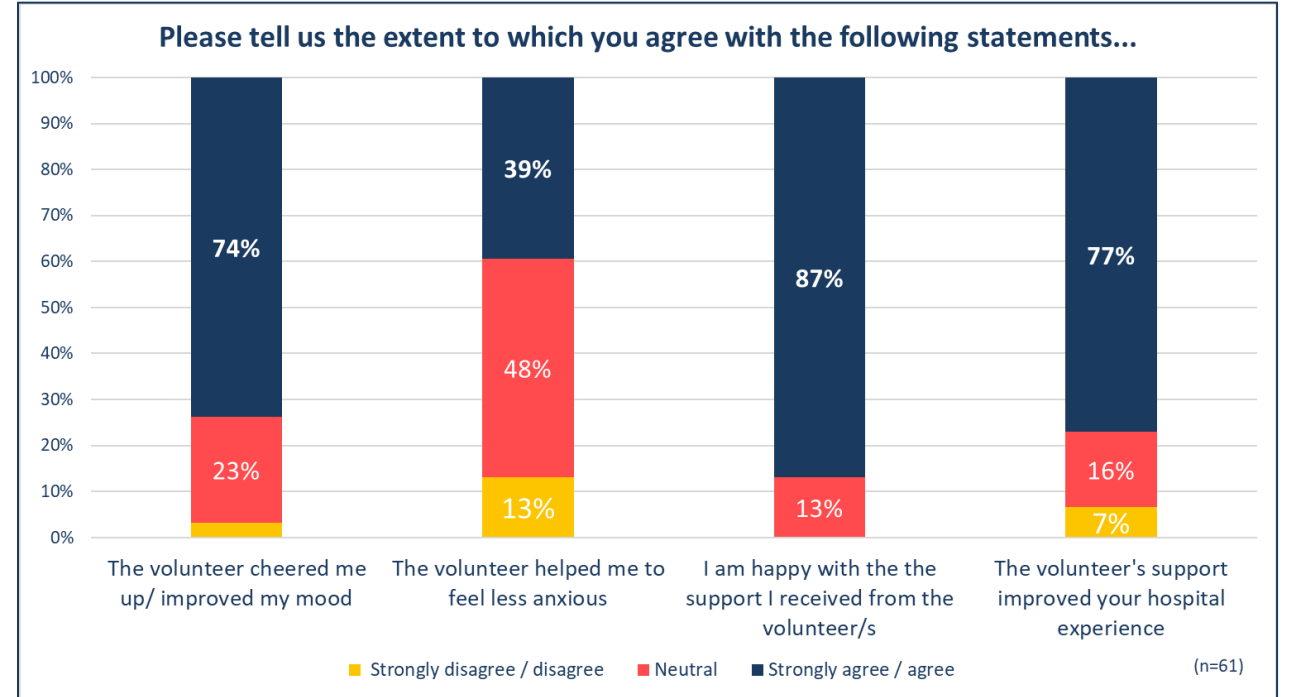
Impact: Patient wellbeing and experience



Patients 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 patients' emotional wellbeing, with 74% of patients agreeing or strongly agreeing that volunteers **improved their mood**.
- Fewer patients felt volunteers impacted upon their anxiety, with 48% providing a neutral response. However, 39% of patients did agree or strongly agree that volunteer support **helped them to feel less anxious**, suggesting volunteers did help to reduce anxiety for some.
- Additionally, volunteers appear to have had a positive impact on individuals' hospital experience. 87% of patients agreed or strongly agreed that they were **happy with the support they received from volunteers** and 77% of patients agreed that volunteers **improved their hospital experience**.

Additional feedback provided by patients further illustrates the difference ward helper volunteers made to patients...



"Volunteers made a difference and they like talking to you, it's very nice. Very good in exercise support make you feel at ease."

Patient



"They're brilliant and they like talking and bring you out of yourself. You can open up to them. They encourage you."

Patient

Impact: Patient experience of therapeutic activities

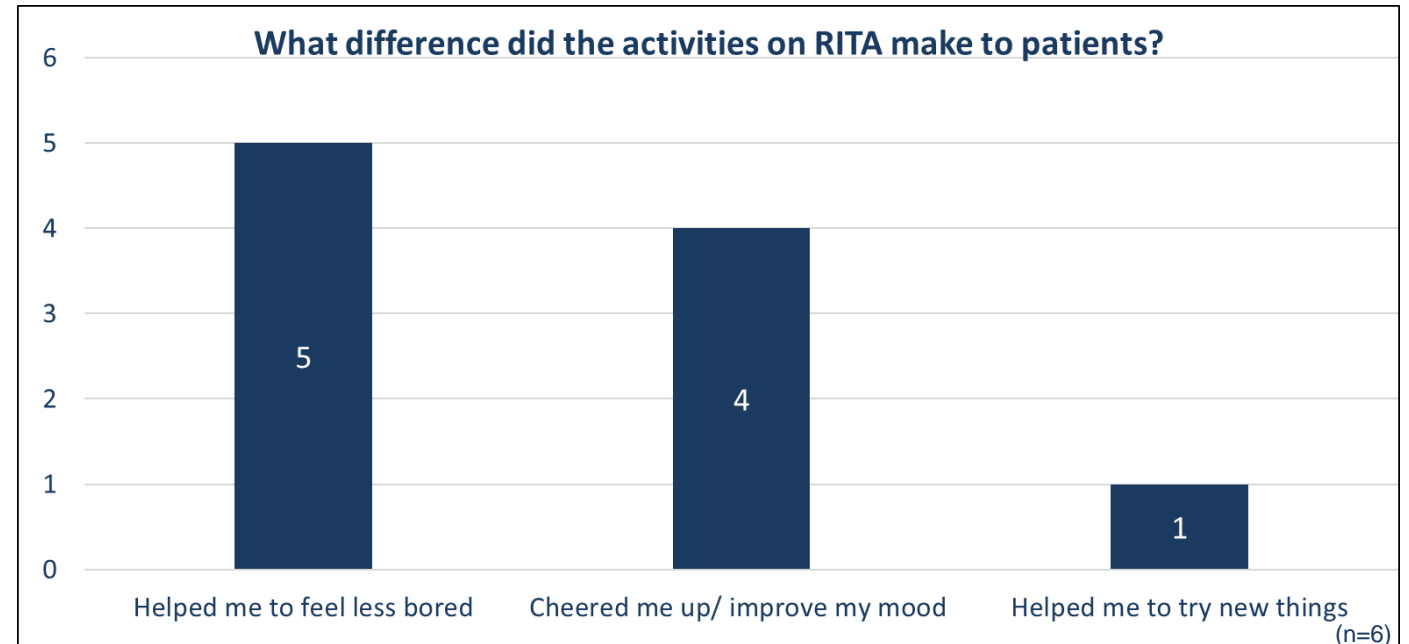


Ward helper volunteers also used Reminiscence / Rehabilitation & Interactive Therapeutic Activities (RITA) technology with patients. RITA aims to help calm, stimulate and reduce anxiety in patients whilst staying on the ward. This software can be used on electronic tablets, consisting of activities such as listening to music, playing games and exercise sessions.

All patients were asked if they had used and engaged with RITA activities when being supported by volunteer. Of the 61 patients who participated in the survey, six patients engaged with these activities.³

These six patients were asked for their feedback on RITA...

- Five patients agreed or strongly agreed that RITA **helped them to feel less bored.**
- Four patients agreed or strongly agreed that RITA **cheered them up / improved their mood.**
- One patient agreed or strongly agreed that RITA **helped them to try new things.**



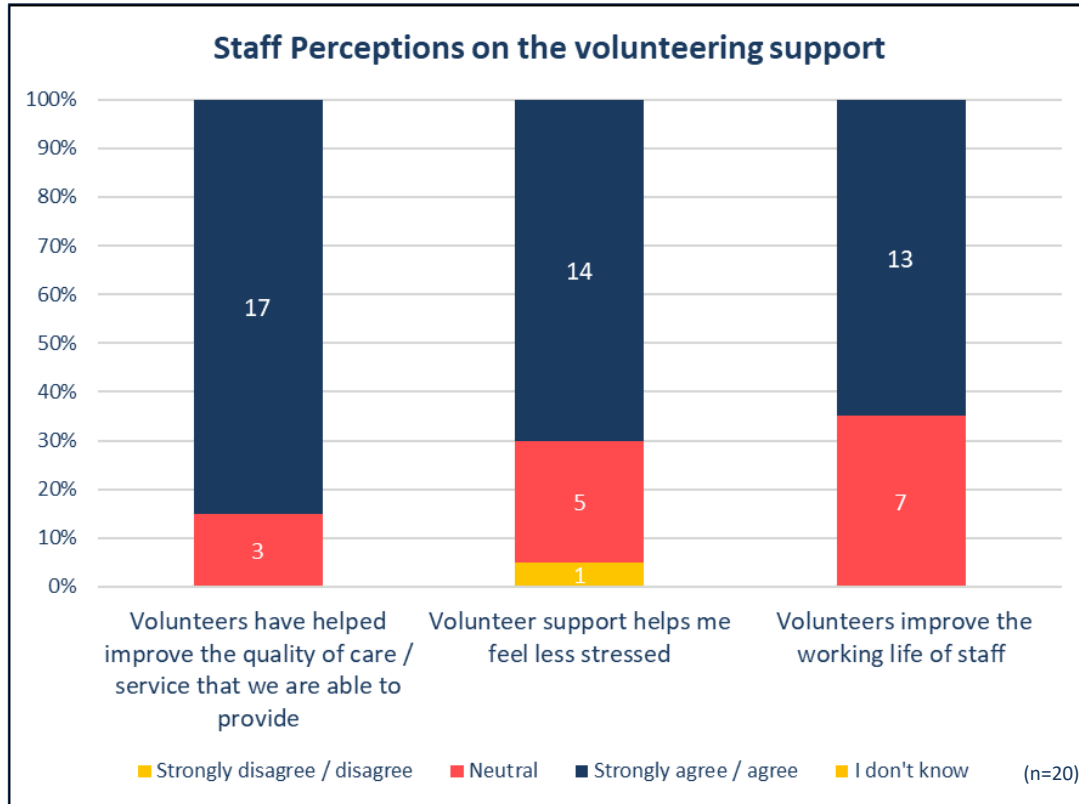
These emerging findings therefore suggest engaging with the volunteer and RITA activities may provide patients with stimulation and improve emotional wellbeing. However, they may require additional activities to enable patients to feel they were trying something new.

³ These numbers are lower than expected. When speaking with staff members who collected feedback from patients, they reflected that patients may not always remember or recognised having engaged with RITA, perhaps due to cognitive impairments. Additionally, availability and access to RITA for volunteers may have been limited. Due to the low response numbers, further data would need to be gathered to confirm these findings.

Impact: Benefits for staff and patients



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



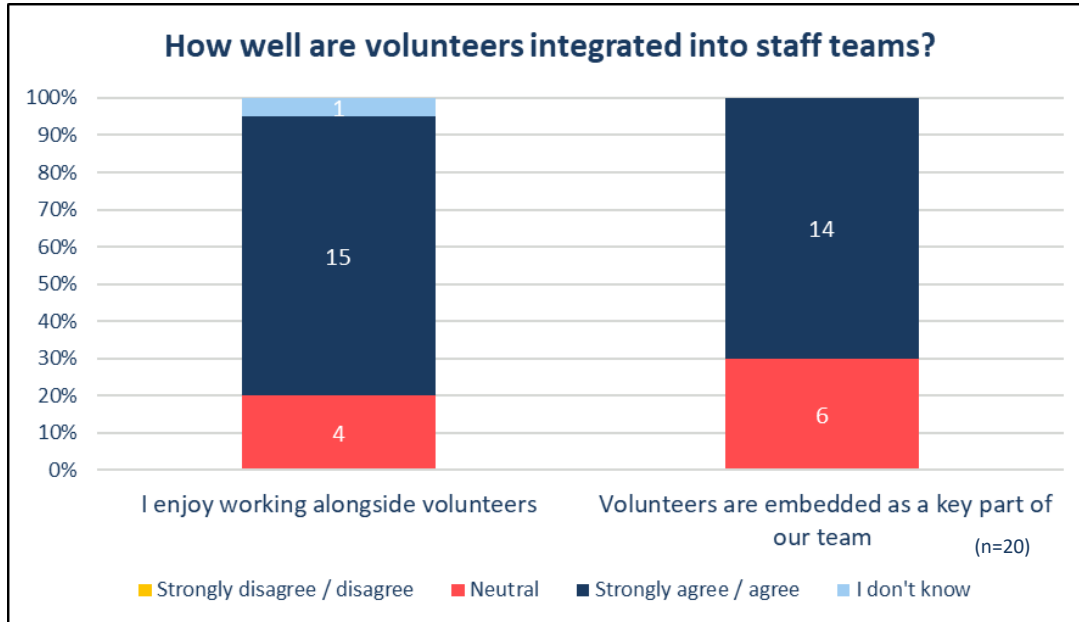
Of the 20 staff members who participated in the survey...

- 17 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.
- 14 agreed or strongly agreed volunteer support **helps them feel less stressed**. Additionally, 13 of 20 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.

Impact: Productivity gains

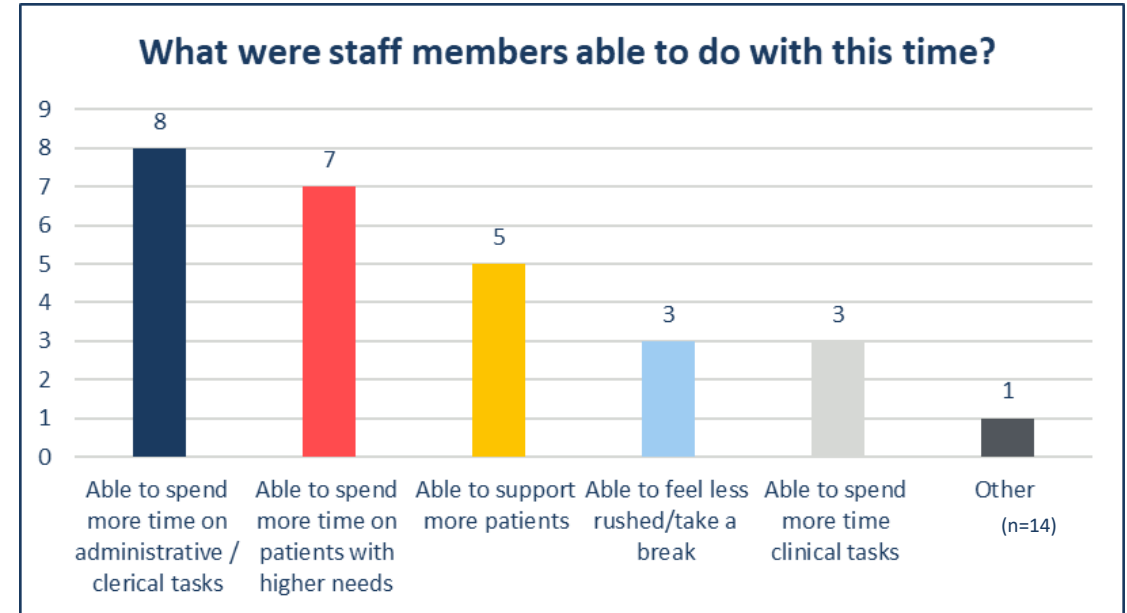


Staff members were asked to reflect on their experience of working alongside volunteers, including how well they were integrated into their teams and their perception of any impact volunteers had on their productivity.



Staff members were asked their perceptions of volunteer support saving them time. 14 staff members...

- Of the 20 staff respondents, 15 stated they **enjoyed working with volunteers** and 14 felt that volunteers were **embedded as a key part of their team**.
- Additionally, several volunteers reported within their feedback that they felt well-supported by staff members and integrated into the team.



- 14 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 administrative / clerical tasks or spend more time with patients who had higher needs.

Impact: Staff member satisfaction




Staff members were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the volunteer support they had received.

Of the 20 staff survey respondents:


- 19 were satisfied or very satisfied, suggesting **high levels of satisfaction with the volunteer support** they had received.
- 18 were somewhat or very likely to **recommend volunteer support to other colleagues**.
- One staff member was unsure, reporting *“our volunteer is a mature person who is totally reliable, professional, consistent and has worked here for a long time and is very skilled at working with our client group... It would be difficult to comment on value of other volunteers as she is very unique, and many inexperienced helpers may require a lot more input from staff.”*
- Another stated they were very unlikely to recommend volunteer support. They did not provide any additional information; however, it appears this may have been selected in error as they expressed they were satisfied with the volunteer support they had received and strongly agreed that volunteers improved their working lives.

Staff members provided additional feedback....




“Our volunteer is tremendous, thoroughly enjoy her coming in to run reminiscence groups with patients.”

Staff member



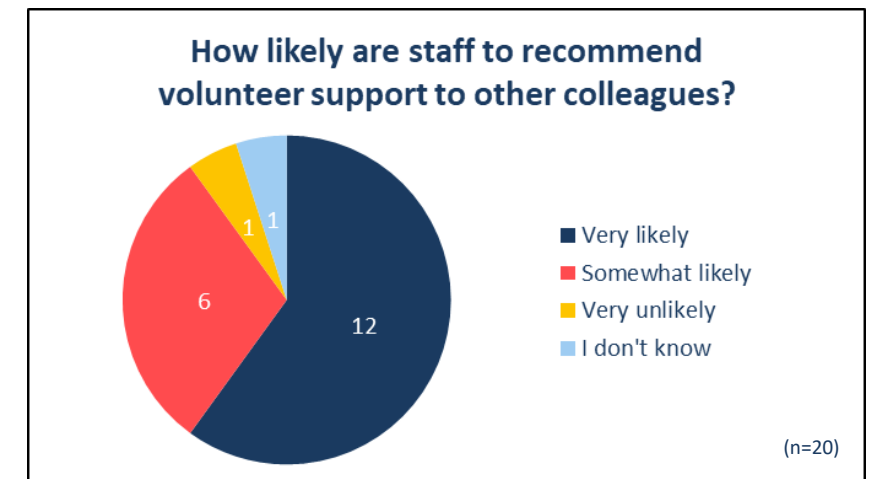
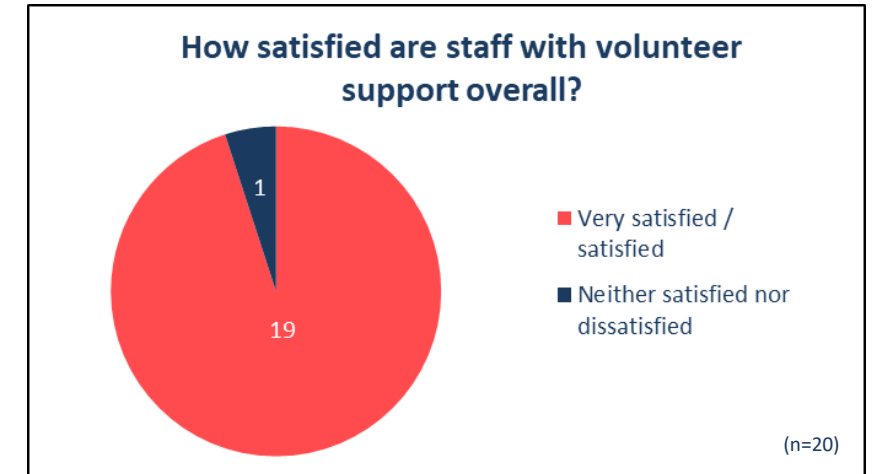
“They support the patients whilst on the ward having time to talk to them to maintain mental stimulation. Which is so important.”

Staff member



“Thank you to all our volunteers, their dedication and enthusiasm is much appreciated by the patients and the staff.”

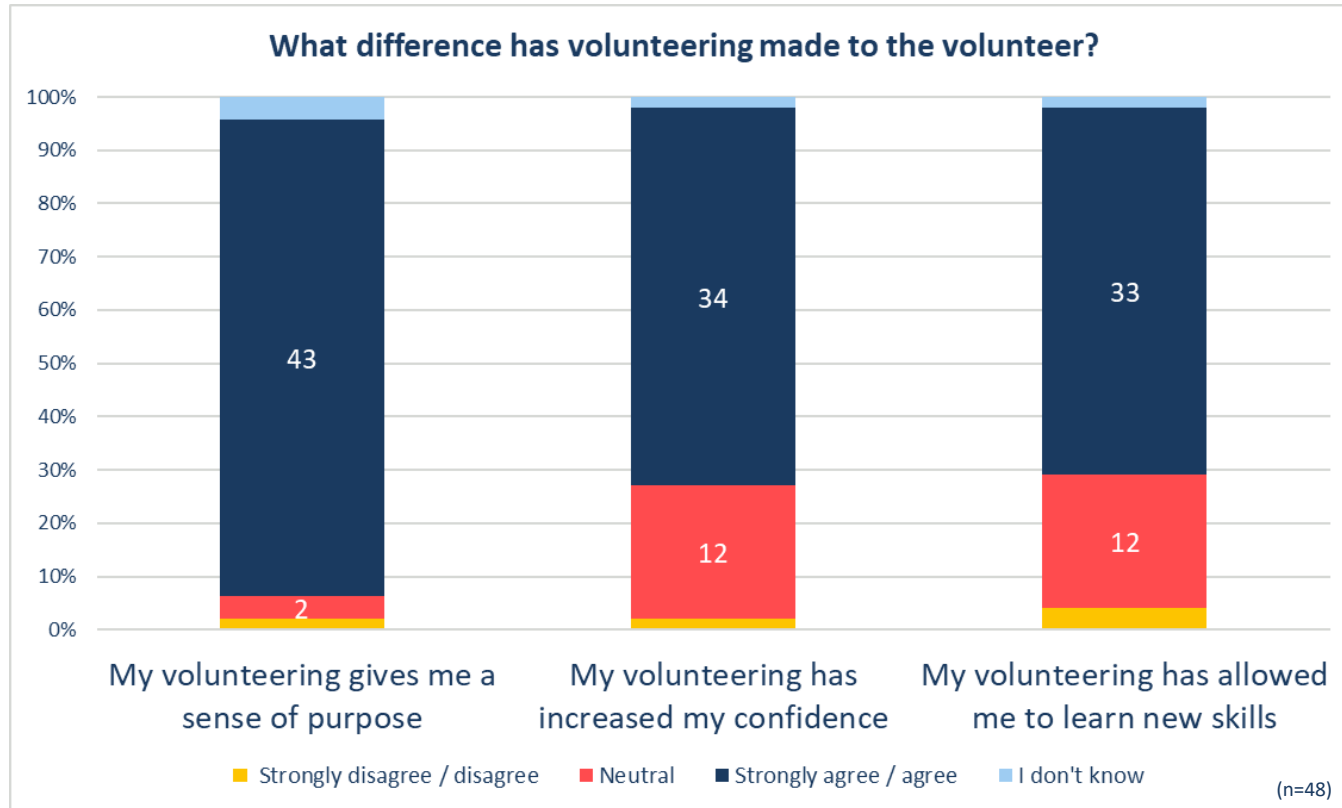
Staff member



Impact: Benefits for volunteers



Volunteers were requested to reflect on the difference volunteering has had for them as individuals.



Findings indicate that for many volunteers there have been benefits to taking on their role. Of the 48 volunteer respondents...

- 43 agreed or strongly agreed that their **volunteering had given them a sense of purpose.**
- 34 agreed or strongly agreed that their **volunteering had increased their confidence.**
- 33 agreed or strongly agreed that their **volunteering has allowed them to develop new skills.**

One volunteer further elaborated...



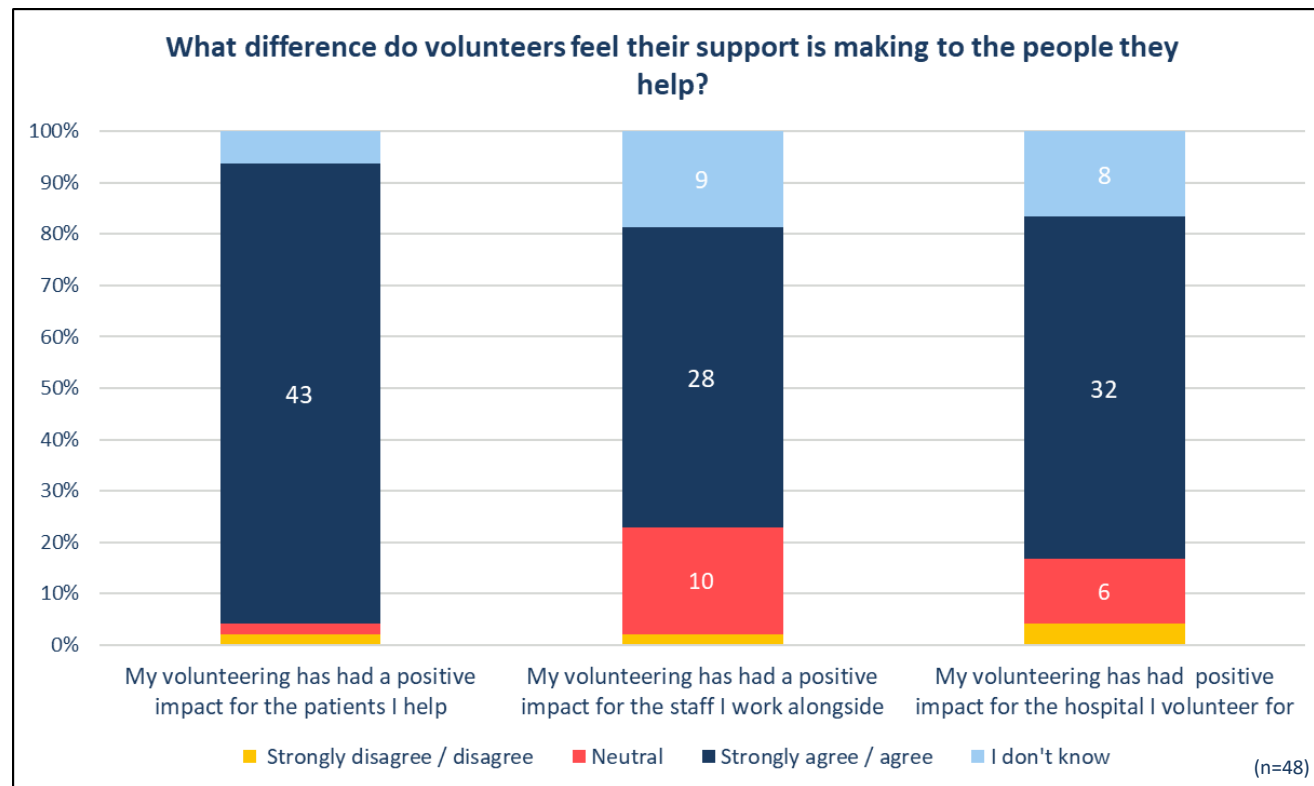
"Volunteering on the ward gives me a sense of purpose & positive experience. Patients appreciate my help as well as the nursing staff."

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.



Of the 48 volunteers who participated in the survey...

- 43 agreed or strongly agreed that their volunteering had a **positive impact for the patients they help.**
- 28 agreed or strongly agreed that their volunteering had a **positive impact for the staff they work alongside.**
- 32 agreed or strongly agreed that their volunteering had a **positive impact for the hospital they volunteer for.**

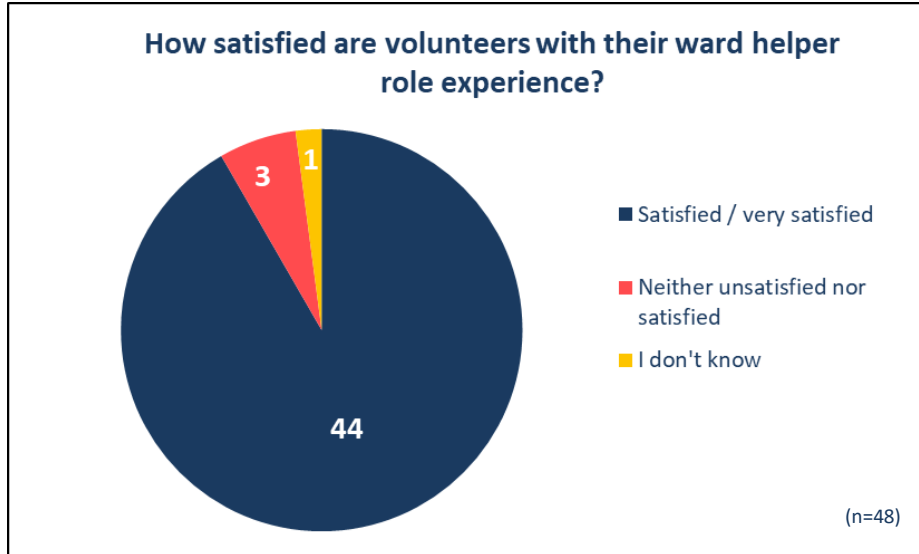
These findings demonstrate that volunteers do feel that their role is making a difference to the people they support, patients in particular. One volunteer stated...



Impact: Volunteer satisfaction



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




- 44 volunteers were **satisfied or very satisfied with their volunteering experience.**
- Three volunteers were **neither unsatisfied nor satisfied** with their volunteering role. One of these individuals provided further feedback explaining they felt they could do more, stating *“the staff were lovely and welcoming, and the patients generally appreciated a chat, but I felt I was underutilised, was not sufficiently helping the ward staff and felt that the patients would have benefited from more hands-on help”*.
- One respondent selected **‘I don’t know’** but did not provide any further information as to why they felt this way.

Volunteers also provided some additional feedback on their experience...



“It’s a pleasure to be of company for those who do not receive visitors and also long-term patients. For me, it’s very rewarding.”

Volunteer



“I appreciate being made to feel part of the ward team when I am on the ward. It is a privilege to speak to so many people and hear their remarkable life stories.”

Volunteer



“It has been a wonderful experience to listen to the patients stories about their life. I hope I have helped them, it's been a privilege to volunteer.”

Volunteer

Insight: Recommended improvements



Within their feedback, some staff and volunteer respondents made some recommendations to improve or expand the ward helper volunteering role.

Shift times



One volunteer explained that the times of the shift can impact on their ability to help patients. They recommended this be taken into consideration when recruiting additional volunteers.

Staff guidance



One volunteer requested that staff provided guidance to volunteers, when starting shift, of which patients in particular may benefit from their support or from using the RITA software.

Service expansion



A member of staff suggested they would like to see an additional activity/exercise role to support the therapy team.



Additionally, one volunteer requested to work on other wards.

Additional training



A member of staff requested volunteers receive a ward induction so they can be shown where key items are stored as well as menu training to ensure volunteers are completing forms correctly.

Conclusions and recommendations

The volunteer ward helper role is an excellent example of where volunteers can make a positive difference to patients and staff. Emerging findings suggest that volunteer support can result in positive outcomes for patients' emotional wellbeing and hospital experience.

Whilst the majority of patients expressed that they did not use RITA, six individuals did use the software and provided feedback that it had helped them to feel less bored and improved their mood. **In future evaluations of RITA, it may be helpful to consider showing a picture of RITA to patients to aid their recall of the software/device when asking questions about it. However, continued consideration should be given as to whether it is appropriate for patients with cognitive impairments to participate in a survey.**

Staff perceptions of volunteers were positive overall, with many reporting that volunteers had helped them with productivity and improved their working lives. Some staff members did suggest that the service could be expanded into other areas of the organisation and that volunteers may benefit from additional ward-based training. **Consideration of further rollout of the ward volunteer role is therefore recommended, as well as the provision of additional training to volunteers to help them to take on their responsibilities.**

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 suggest that additional benefits had been achieved for volunteers, including an increased sense of purpose and confidence. 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.

Evaluation limitations

Due to the nature of this evaluation, there are limitations to the strength of conclusions this evaluation can draw. Low response numbers, although representative of the participants in the evaluation, do mean that the findings should not be attributed to a wider population. Additionally, as data collection was only carried out for less than 2 months, the findings could be limited.

Patients being supported by the ward helper volunteers may, in some instances, have had cognitive impairments. Researchers recommended that only individuals who staff members were confident were able to provide consent should be asked to participate in the evaluation. However, this does mean that findings may not be fully reflective of those who received support.

Acknowledgements

Helpforce would like to pass on our thanks to **Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust**, and in particular to Amanda Cleaver, Volunteer Services & Community Development Lead. We also share our appreciation to the patients, staff and volunteers who participated in providing their feedback.

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Thank you

help@helpforce.community
www.helpforce.community

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