

The Lighthouse, Surrey

Evaluation Report

July 2024

helpforce

THE LIGHTHOUSE

Evaluation funded by:



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Executive summary

The project

The Lighthouse runs a multitude of activities from their four community projects (two hubs and two pop-ups) across Surrey, aimed at supporting, encouraging and empowering those who find themselves on the margins.

Key findings

- Guests have had overwhelmingly positive experiences at The Lighthouse, with high levels of satisfaction and their expectations met or exceeded. They report improved social connectedness, personal development and an increased sense of stability.
- One fifth of guests said they didn't know where they would have gone for support without The Lighthouse and 46% said they would have otherwise gone to a healthcare provider if The Lighthouse wasn't available.
- Volunteers have also had very positive experiences, feeling happy and supported in their roles. They report feeling connected to their community, having a sense of purpose and being confident that their volunteering is having a positive impact on others.
- As a vital community asset, ongoing and new funding should be considered by multiple donors and commissioners, including local authority, NHS, and the business community, to enable The Lighthouse to sustain, grow and continue benefiting the local community.

Conclusions & recommendations

The Lighthouse is providing integral support to local people, for which one fifth of guests felt there is no known alternative. The range of activities and projects have led to wide-ranging outcomes for guests and volunteers, alongside general satisfaction amongst both groups. The findings from this report also suggest that The Lighthouse is delivering support that may be helping to divert additional demand from NHS services. Only minor suggestions for improvement were provided by guests and volunteers which should be considered to further optimise already positive experiences.

Evaluation approach

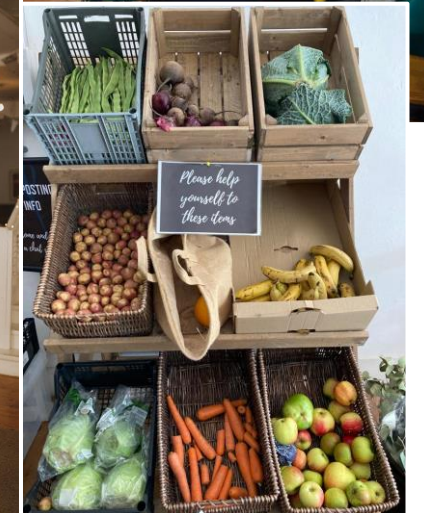
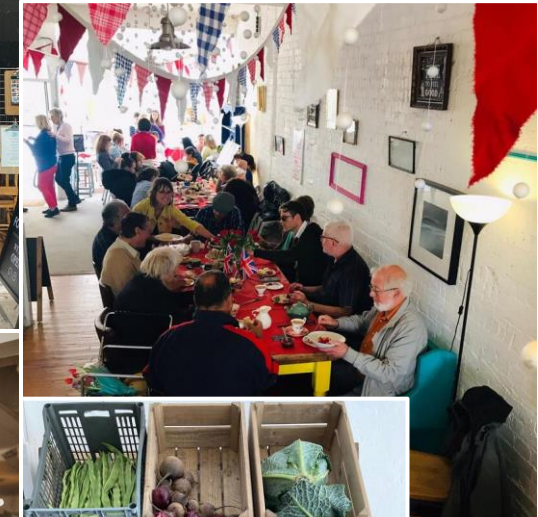
The evaluation gathered feedback from guests (92 responses) and volunteers (65 responses) via surveys between April and June 2024. Data on visits and project activity was provided by The Lighthouse staff team.



A selection of outcomes evidenced by this evaluation.

Service overview

- The Lighthouse started as a community hub in Woking in 2011 after a large derelict building which had been earmarked for demolition was acquired, refurbished and revitalised into a community space.
- It has since expanded, with another hub opening in Barnsbury in 2021 and pop-up projects being run in Aldershot and Guildford. The opening of a third hub in Aldershot is planned for the coming months at the time of this report being written.
- The Lighthouse aims to support the local community through relief of poverty of resources, relationships, identity, finance, education and spirit. They host a range of creative projects to support, encourage and empower those who find themselves on the margins.
- In 2022, The Lighthouse was awarded a Queen's Award for Voluntary Services (QAVC) which recognises outstanding work done by volunteers in their own communities. As the highest national award presented to local volunteer groups across the UK, it is regarded as equivalent to an MBE for volunteer groups and is awarded for the lifetime of an organisation.¹



¹ Queen's Award for Voluntary Services now known as The King's Award for Voluntary Services: [The King's Award for Voluntary Service - official website \(dcms.gov.uk\)](https://www.dcms.gov.uk/king-award)

Support offered



The Lighthouse runs a range of activities through their hubs and pop-up projects. These include:

- A foodbank.
- Jigsaw Storehouse, providing free access to pre-loved children's clothing, toys and equipment.
- The Hygiene Bank, providing free access to toiletries and personal items.
- A weekly free community lunch.
- The Ukrainian hub, supporting refugees in the local community.
- Budgeting and debt advice.
- Drop in chat and support from volunteers.
- Cooking and baking lessons.
- Seasonal projects such as:
 - 'Back to School', providing children with a new backpack with school essentials, a pre-loved uniform and a voucher for new school shoes.
 - 'Prom Project', providing prom clothing to school and college leavers.

The full range of projects can be found on [The Lighthouse website](#).

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.



Guests

Relief of poverty of resources, e.g. improved access to resources

Relief of poverty of relationships, e.g. reduced feelings of loneliness, sense of community

Relief of poverty of identity, e.g. improved emotional wellbeing

Improved understanding of how to access support within the community

Satisfied with their support experience



Volunteer

Confidence that time spent volunteering is of benefit to guests and staff

Feel like they are part of the community

Improved confidence & sense of purpose

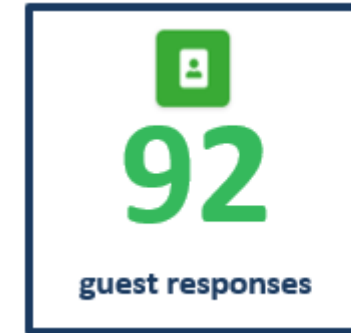
Feel well supported in undertaking their volunteering role

Satisfied with and happy in their role

Evaluation approach: Methodology

Data collection for the evaluation consisted of:

- A survey of people attending The Lighthouse (known as 'guests'), asking about the support they received, their perceptions of the support and the difference it has made to them. The survey was completed by those attending the hubs in Woking and Barnsbury.
- A survey of Lighthouse volunteers, asking them about the impact volunteering has had on them and their overall experience.



It is known that some volunteers are also guests who have been provided with support. These volunteers (4 of the 65) were given the opportunity to answer both sets of questions.

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...



Activity

- Between April and June 2024, The Lighthouse in Woking had over 4,000 visits from guests. Further visits were made to the Barnsbury hub, but this isn't quantifiable as guests don't check in there.
- Activity from a small selection of the individual projects during this timeframe can be seen on the right.
- There are 3 full-time and 13 part-time staff members who manage, support and facilitate the running of the hubs and various projects that take place.
- Their work is supported by an estimated 300 volunteers each year, consisting of:
 - 181 registered volunteers who have given their time over the last year;
 - Approximately 50 volunteers who support the foodbank; and
 - Corporate volunteers on an ad hoc basis.
- The Lighthouse also works collaboratively with a number of partners to support guests, including NHS WithYou, Foodwise, Citizens Advice Woking, HomeStart and iAccess.

Woking foodbank provided food for 785 adults and 495 children, with some of those visiting more than once in the period.

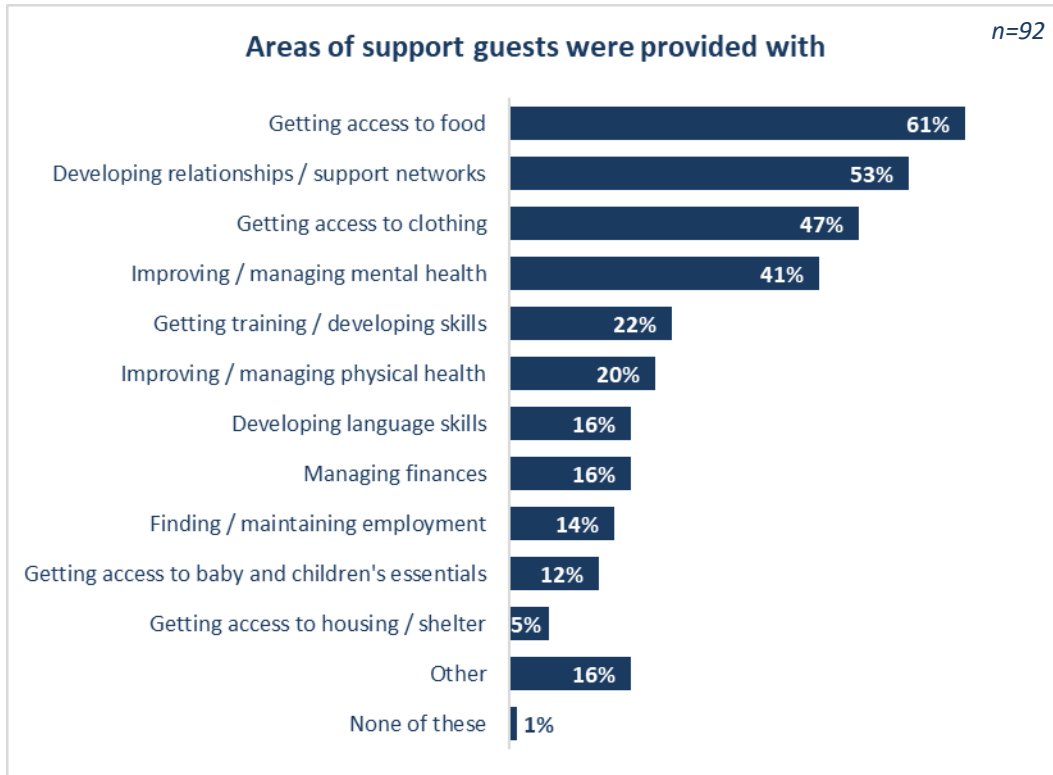
Woking hygiene bank has 183 registered guests, 33 new this quarter, and gave out 807 personal care items.

The **Back to School** project received 1,100 referrals to provide essential school items to local children. The Guildford project alone gave away £3k worth of shoe vouchers.

The **Ukrainian Hub** saw 551 visits from Ukrainian refugee families, accessing community lunches, workshops and Citizens Advice 1:1s.



Insight: Support received

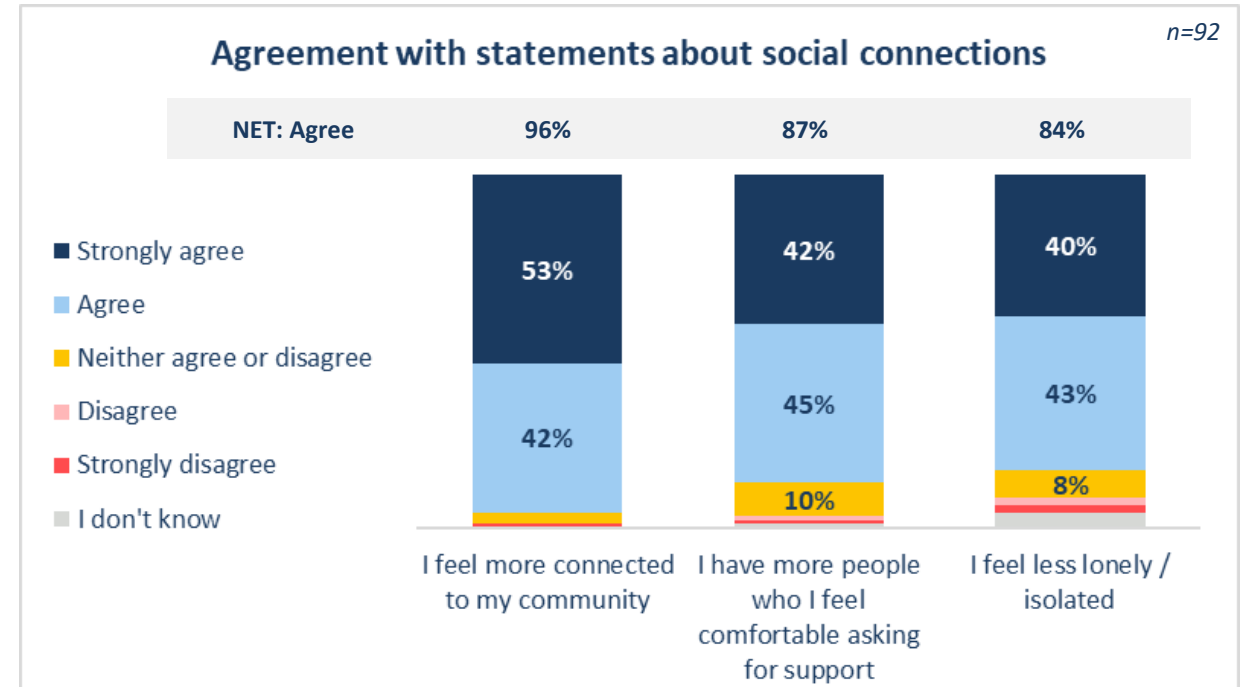


- Surveyed guests were asked in which areas they were provided support by The Lighthouse. They could select as many options as were applicable to them, and on average selected 3 areas each.
- Most commonly, guests had been supported with getting access to food, developing relationships, getting access to clothing, and improving / managing their mental health. These options were each selected by at least two fifths of guests.
- Other support around skill development, physical health, finances, employment and baby / children's essentials were mentioned less frequently but still by at least 10% of guests.
- 16% reported that they had received another type of support than those listed in the survey. These included:
 - Work experience;
 - Feeling part of the community;
 - Social activities;
 - Immigration and benefits application support;
 - Self-employment support; and
 - Specific groups, e.g. toddler group, baking table group.



Impact: Guests' social connections

- When asked about their time attending The Lighthouse and the difference it has made to them, almost all surveyed guests (96%) agreed or strongly agreed that they feel more connected to their community.
- High levels of agreement were also seen from guests regarding now having more people who they feel comfortable asking for support (87%) and feeling less lonely / isolated (84%).
- This shows that The Lighthouse is enabling social connectedness and a sense of community amongst guests, something which was reinforced in guests' comments.



"Knowing that I can attend Lighthouse for company and not feel so isolated as I live alone after my children have flown the nest."

Guest

"A friendly and warm welcome from everyone. Feeling more included in community."

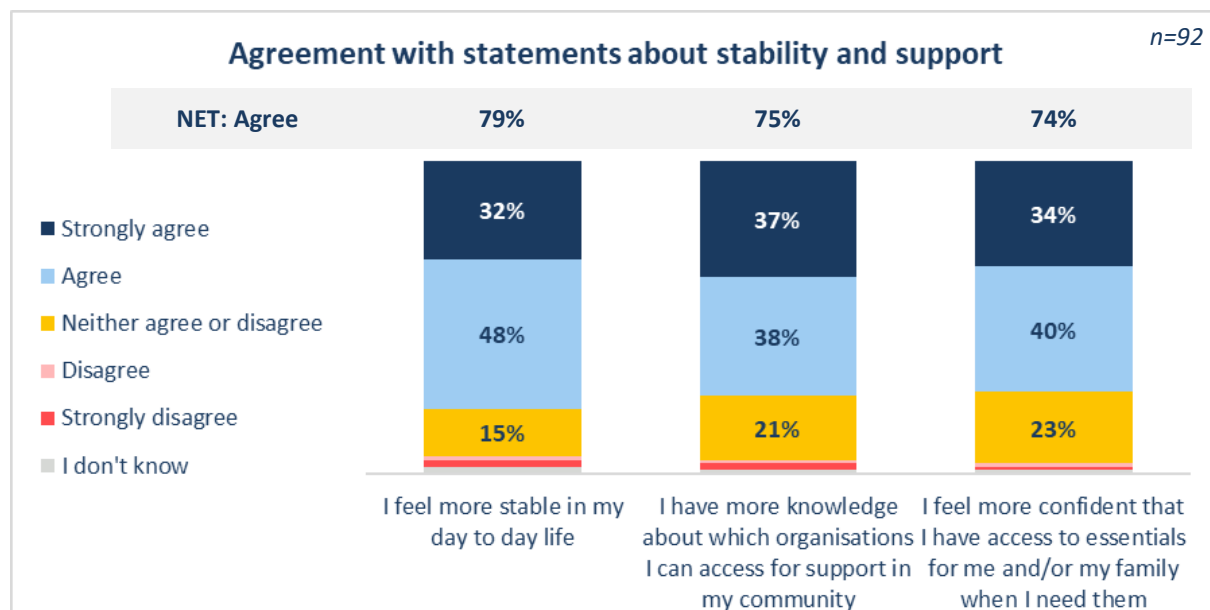
Guest

"It brings people together. I love the warm welcome and atmosphere. I love being with my friends and the warmth, comfort and caring for each other."

Guest



Impact: Guests' stability & support



"It gives me a sense of rhythm and routine."
Guest

"The foodbank is so needed especially with rising cost of living."
Guest

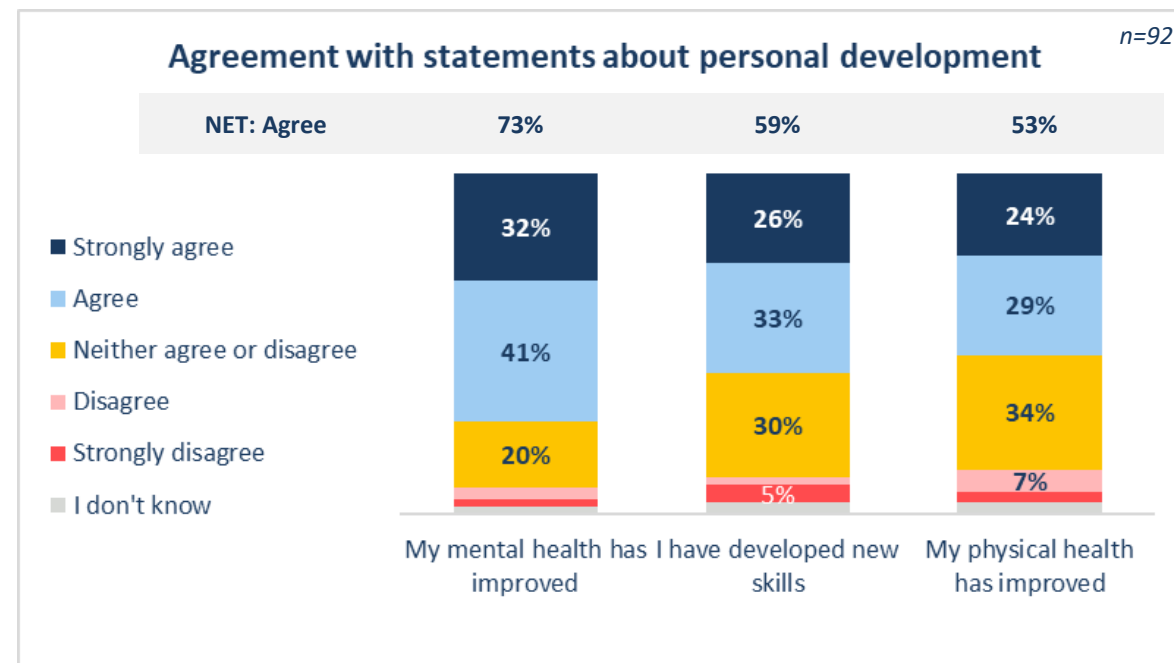
"I am glad that I have the opportunity to apply at any time and in most cases I will receive help, advice or be directed to the place where I need to go."
Guest

- When thinking about the difference The Lighthouse has made to them, almost four fifths of guests agreed or strongly agreed that they feel more stable in their life.
- Three quarters of guests agreed or strongly agreed that they have more knowledge about organisations they can access for support and that they feel more confident that they have access to the essentials they need.
- Comments from some guests reflect this, with one noting that when The Lighthouse is not able to help them directly they will be signposted to other support, and another highlighting the importance of the foodbank during difficult financial times.



Impact: Guests' personal development

- Almost three quarters of guests agreed or strongly agreed that their mental health has improved during their time attending The Lighthouse.
 - Interestingly, by comparison, only 41% said that they had received support with improving / managing their mental health, implying that guests are seeing a positive impact on their mental health even when they aren't specifically supported for that.
- While lower than other measures, still over half of guests agreed that they have developed new skills (59%) and that their physical health has improved (53%).
- However, when these statements are cross-referenced with the areas of support guests were provided with, we can see that agreement with each one is actually higher when they are limited to the groups they are of most relevance to:
 - 100% of guests (28 of 28) who received support with getting training / developing skills and/or developing language skills agreed that they have developed new skills.
 - 78% of guests (14 of 18) who received support with their physical health agreed that their physical health has improved.



"My difficult times when I was homeless passed a little easier because of them. My mental health was relatively stable because of the warm welcome I received from every member of staff. Thank you!"


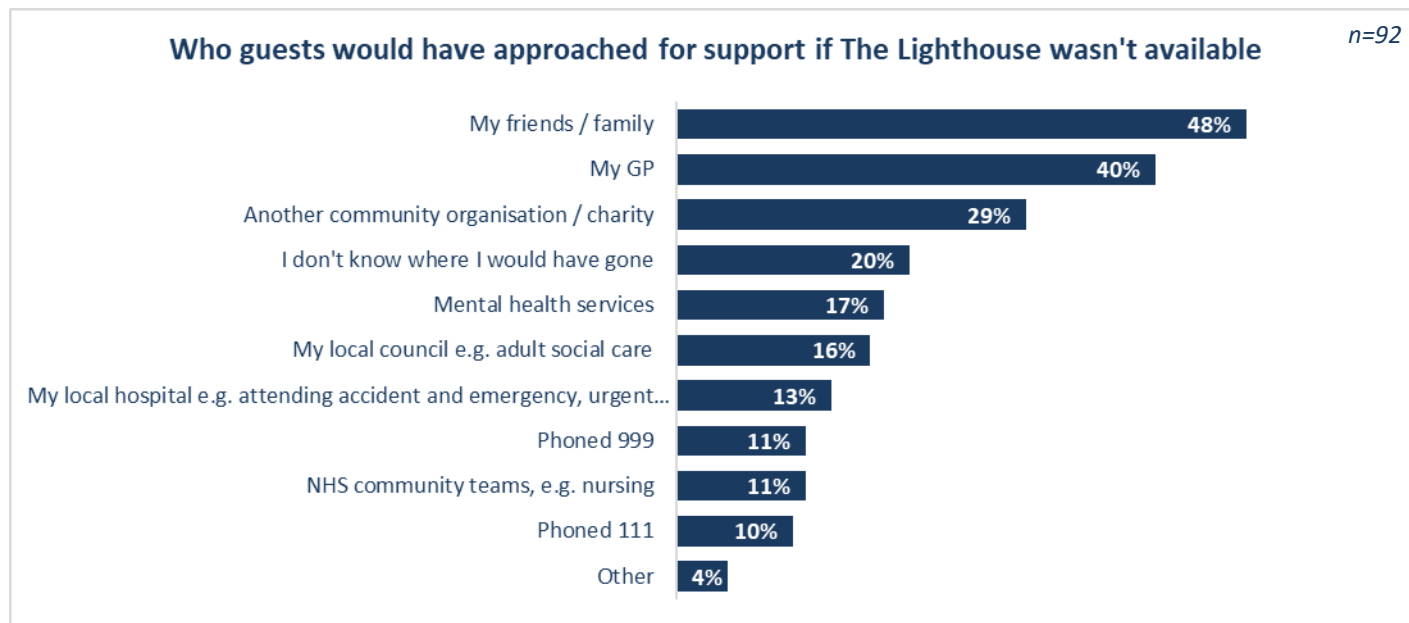
Guest

"Really helped my mental health for support and company. Boosted my confidence and self-esteem."

Guest



Impact: Alternative sources of support



46%
said they would otherwise
have approached a
healthcare provider for
support

- On average, guests identified two different sources of support they would have approached if The Lighthouse wasn't available, the most common being their friends and/or family at 48%.
- Almost half of guests reported that they would have sought support from at least one healthcare provider, the most frequently mentioned being their GP. This suggests that the presence of The Lighthouse may have diverted guests from seeking NHS support for issues which can be managed elsewhere.
- Critically, a fifth of guests were unable to identify an alternative source of support and said they don't know where they would have gone, implying that The Lighthouse is meeting a need for which there is no known alternative for some guests.

Healthcare provider = GP, mental health services, local hospital, 999, NHS community teams, 111.

Impact: Guest satisfaction



98% of guests were **satisfied or very satisfied** with their experience



77% were **very satisfied**



97% of guests had their expectations met or exceeded



61% had them exceeded

Suggested improvements from guests included:

- Extended opening days/times;
- Expansion / more space;
- Lift for disabled access;
- More activities for children;
- Computer skills / technology training;
- More English lessons; and
- Access to more beauty services.

“Volunteers and the leaders who wear Lighthouse ID are ever welcoming , very good listeners and encourage the visitors to discuss any issues in their lives and seem to be either helping them or guiding them to the right places for further help.”

Guest

“Varied. Supportive. As a male suffering from domestic abuse by my wife, the Lighthouse was the only place that took me seriously at first.”

Guest

“Very supportive and friendly staff. Various activities for locals. The atmosphere, the creativity and the joyful environment. I am really grateful for everything Lighthouse offers.”

Guest

Jo-Dee's story

"I was introduced to The Lighthouse when I found myself in a very dark place. I was just made homeless and was living in a shelter. I had also just been diagnosed with a serious health problem and was really lonely, scared and pretty much down and out with very low self-esteem. I started at The Baking Table (a group for vulnerable women to learn to bake together) and then was welcomed into other programmes.

Having a group of people to talk to who didn't want anything from me other than to be there for me was such a great feeling. I felt heard and important to them, which improved my self-esteem. All the courses helped me work through some issues I had been faced with and started my journey to recovery.

The Lighthouse was there to help me when I was given my apartment and they even helped me be mobile by getting me a brand-new bike. Wow! Freedom! It was amazing! Not only was it good exercise, but it meant I could go anywhere when I needed to.

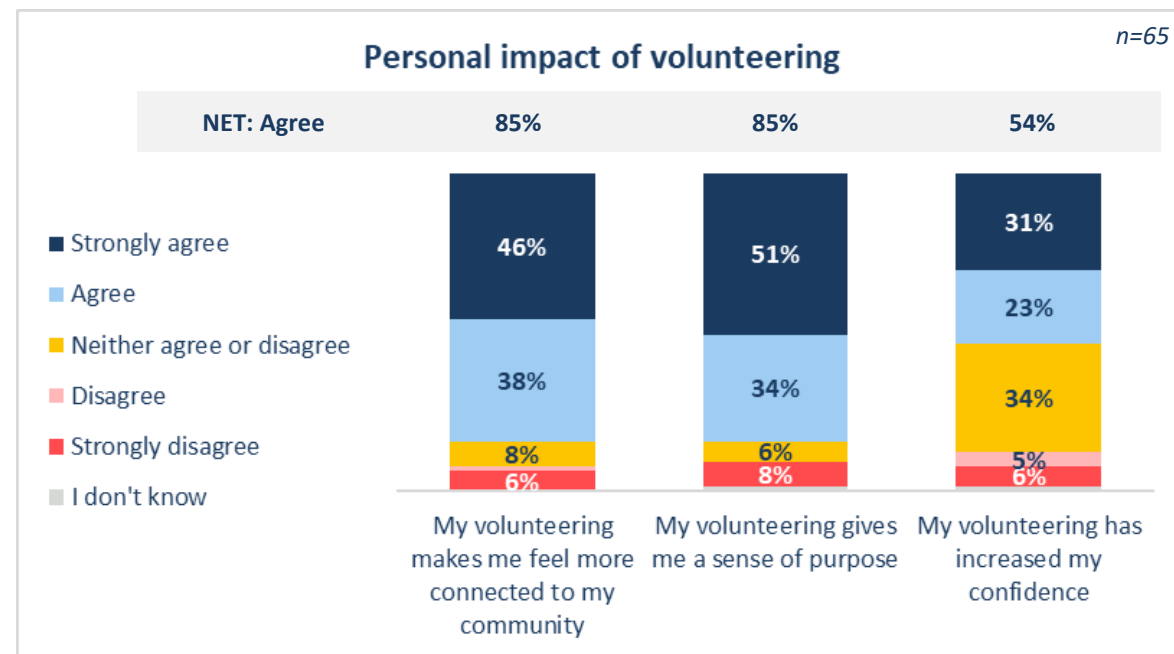
I am forever grateful for all the things that The Lighthouse has done for me and I have witnessed so many things that they have done for others. People are blossoming all around me with their help. I would not be on the road to recovery without their love and support. We need more people like those who make up the Lighthouse and we need more Lighthouses around to reach others in need."

Jo-Dee is now part of the Nurture team, helping The Lighthouse to reach other women and transform their lives. Nurture offers free weekly workshops for women, promoting self-care, resilience, self-esteem and friendship.



Impact: Personal impact of volunteering

- Volunteers were asked about the impact they feel volunteering at The Lighthouse has had on them.
- Similarly to guests, the majority of volunteers agreed or strongly agreed that they feel more connected to their community. This implies that The Lighthouse is able to foster a sense of community regardless of whether the person is being supported or providing support.
- An equivalent proportion (85%) agreed or strongly agreed that their volunteering gives them a sense of purpose.
- Agreement that their volunteering has increased their confidence was lower than for other statements, with an increased proportion remaining neutral or disagreeing.
 - Most volunteers who were neutral or disagreed still reported satisfaction with their volunteering role, so it may be that increased confidence was not an expected or desired outcome for them.



"A friendly, family-like environment where mutual support is always present."

Volunteer

"It gives me a sense of purpose and an opportunity to use the training and skills and experience gained over a long life."

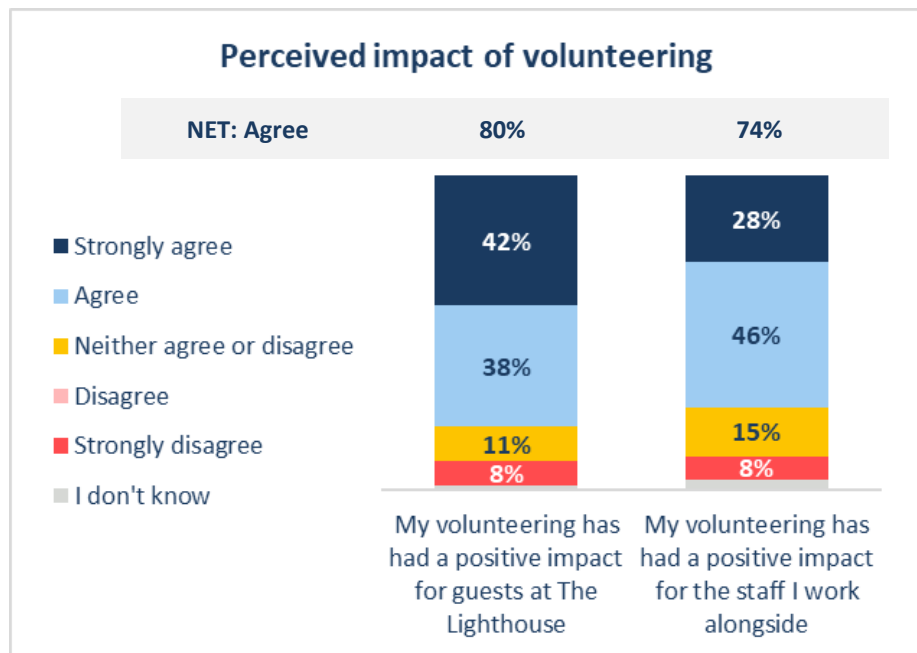
Volunteer

"Enables you to connect with the local community and some who are less privileged and on the edge of society."

Volunteer



Impact: Perceived impact of volunteering



- Volunteers were also asked about the impact they feel their volunteering at The Lighthouse has on others.
- Four fifths of volunteers agreed or strongly agreed that their volunteering has a positive impact on guests, and 74% that it has a positive impact on The Lighthouse's staff.
- This sentiment was reflected in comments provided by volunteers.

"You build up relationships with both the team and the attendees. You can see that what is being provided is appreciated and makes a difference."

Volunteer

"I love helping the people who are less fortunate than me and putting smiles on their faces."

Volunteer

"I enjoy volunteering with other people who want to make a positive impact on our local community."

Volunteer

It is important to note that there were four volunteers who strongly disagreed with all agreement scale questions and one who strongly disagreed or disagreed with all. Four of five of these volunteers said they were very satisfied with their role, so the response options may have been misread / selected in error.



Impact: Volunteer support & satisfaction



85% of volunteers agreed or strongly agreed that they **received enough training and support** to perform their role



89% of volunteers were **satisfied or very satisfied** with their role, **69%** very satisfied

Suggested improvements from volunteers included:

- Training on who to signpost guests to and referral criteria for services;
- Social and networking opportunities within and between teams;
- Giving information and opportunities to be involved in a range of projects;
- Streamlining processes and training standards in the Cosy (on-site café).

However, most volunteers gave only positive comments.

"I love the feeling of belonging to such a good cause and giving something to the local community."

Volunteer

"It's a challenging, interesting position which I feel equipped for. I work with my family which is great. Lucy [Centre Manager] lets us just get on with our roles."

Volunteer

"I love it. It's a special place to be. I totally trust and respect the team. They live out the values of the Lighthouse. I can be myself, I can serve others and receive from them. Lucy is an amazing facilitative and supportive manager. I like that we don't all work in silos, we are flexible, the guests come first. The variety of volunteers is great too. I have confidence in the Safeguarding, and we have had some excellent training recently from the NHS. I like the way we work with other services, statutory and voluntary. Sense of fun as well as compassion."

Volunteer

Conclusions & recommendations

- Guests report having an **overwhelmingly positive experience** at The Lighthouse, evidenced by **high levels of satisfaction** and a high proportion having their **expectations met or exceeded**.
- When guests reflected on the difference attending The Lighthouse has made to them, improved **social connectedness**, feeling more **stable** in their life, being more confident that they have **access to essentials** and **improved mental health** came out strongly.
- The hubs appear to be a **vital source of support** for some, with a fifth of guests saying that they don't know where they would have gone for support otherwise. 46% reported that they would have approached a healthcare provider if The Lighthouse wasn't available, suggesting that the support could be **helping to divert additional demand from NHS services**.
- Volunteers also report **positive experiences**, with high levels of **satisfaction** and agreement that they **feel supported and well trained in their roles**. Their volunteering appears to deliver a **sense of purpose**, and the majority have confidence that their volunteering is having a **positive impact** on guests and staff members.
- It was strongly evidenced that both guests and volunteers feel **more connected to their community** through The Lighthouse. Projects and activities should continue to ensure that this is fostered, with a number commenting on this as a real positive of the hubs.
- **Only minor suggestions** were provided by guests and volunteers that could help to improve The Lighthouse. It should be considered whether these suggestions can be acted on to further improve the already positive experiences of beneficiaries.
- As a **vital community asset**, ongoing and new **funding should be considered by multiple donors and commissioners**, including local authority, NHS, and the business community, to enable The Lighthouse to sustain, grow and continue benefiting the local community.

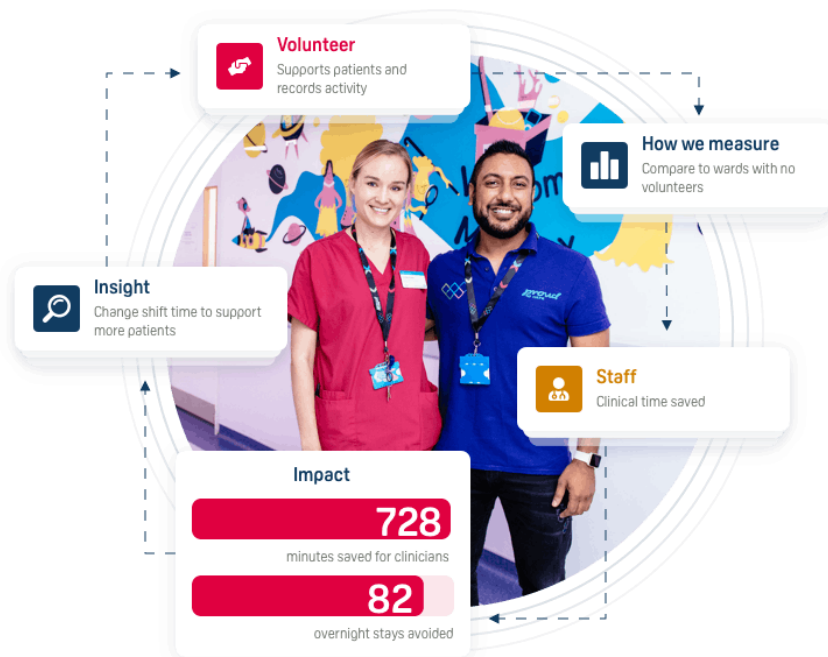
Acknowledgements

Helpforce would like to give our thanks to The Lighthouse, particularly to Emma Stewart Darling (Administrator / Volunteer Co-Ordinator) and Lucy Greenland (Centre Manager) whose support was integral to the project's set up and data collection. We also extend our appreciation to the guests and volunteers who gave their time to provide feedback. Our thanks also go to Surrey Heartlands ICB for providing the funding for this evaluation.

Appendix: About the Helpforce Insight & Impact Service

What is it?

- [The I&I Service](#) is an online tool to help you easily and effectively evaluate your voluntary project or initiative.
- It guides you on a simple 4-step process, from designing outcomes for your beneficiaries through to what data we will need to collect - how, when, and from whom.
- Resulting in an evaluation report that our team produces for you, showing evidence of impact made against the outcomes and insights around how the project is working.



How the service is making a difference

We have worked with many NHS and VCS organisations over the last 3 years to collect data on over 100 high-impact voluntary projects. We have produced [evidenced findings](#) against a broad range health and care outcome measures, that have helped to scale up volunteering services and unlock additional funding for our partners.

A guide to some key terms we use



Insights provide an understanding of a situation or problem. They help us to share valuable information around what is working well, and what is not working so well, so that we can advise on potential service improvements and developments.



Impact relates to evidence of lasting and sustainable changes. Impact data helps us to understand the value and difference being made as a result of the project.

Evidence is reviewed against the following criteria to determine if it is **compelling**, **promising**, or **limited**:



- Is the sample size / response rate reliable and robust?
- Is the data direct or a proxy measure?
- Is there a causal link between the evidence and the outcome?
- Is there a control group or comparative data set?
- How was the evidence gathered – directly from participants, or via a third party?
- Was the survey question well designed, or has there been signs of misunderstanding by participants?

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Thank you

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