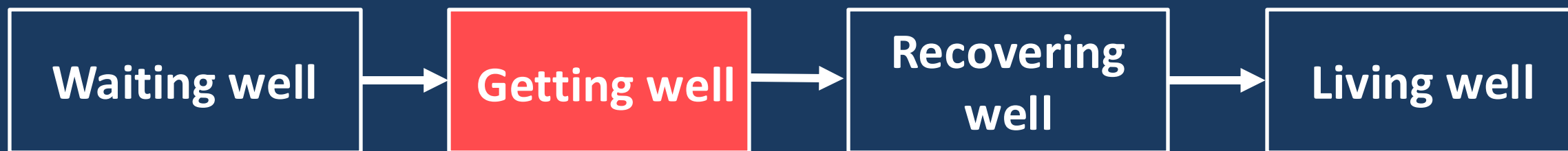


Volunteer support from hospital into the community:

The impact of the George Eliot Hospital Back to Health Pathway



Summary, June 2024 (you can read the full report [here](#))

helpforce



George Eliot Hospital
NHS Trust

What is the Back to Health Pathway?

The Pathway combines new and existing services, where volunteers – in hospital or in the community – work alongside staff to support patients at all stages of their treatment and recovery journey.

The Pathway has been a success, demonstrating the impact of volunteering at scale:

40,107
patients supported

Missed appointments
reduced by up to
5.8%

111 weeks
of productivity gains

3,450
comfort calls made to
discharged patients

The **Back to Health Pathway (BthP)** was set up to build on volunteers' fantastic contribution to the George Eliot Hospital NHS Trust during the pandemic. The aim of the Pathway was to extend volunteer support beyond the hospital, into the community, and to tackle systemic challenges like over-stretched staff, high rates of missed appointments (Did Not Attends, or DNAs), patients not being able to leave hospital as soon as they are well, and health inequalities.

Based on the business case made after an initial two-year evaluated programme, the Pathway and the dedicated roles involved are now incorporated into business as usual.

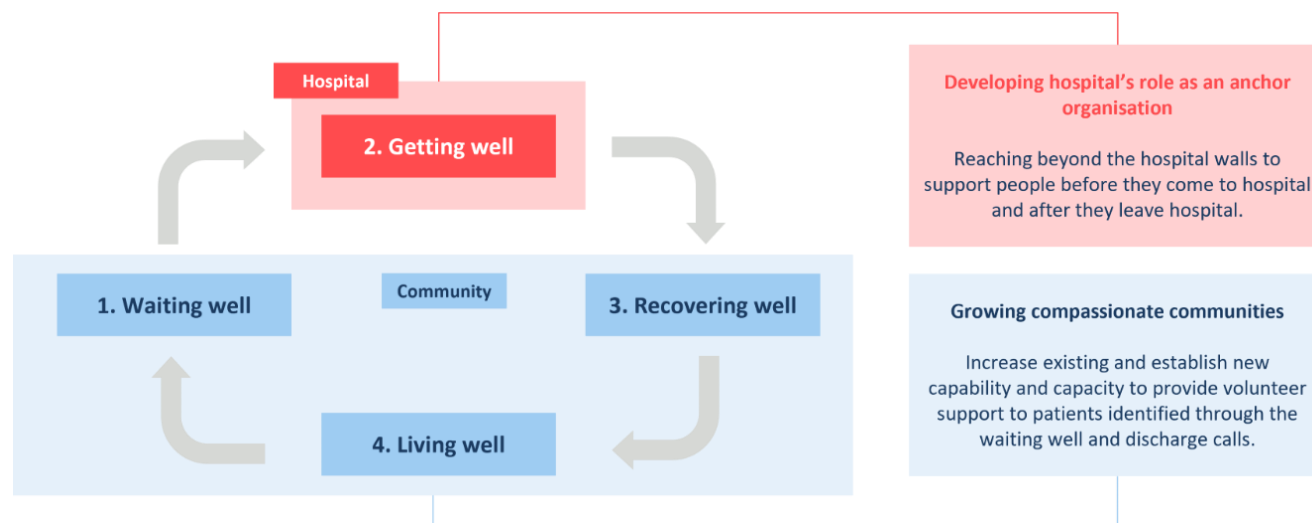
George Eliot Hospital NHS Trust leads this collaborative project across Warwickshire North Place, working with Helpforce and a wide range of local organisations, including GPs, the local authority and voluntary and community social enterprise (VCSE) organisations.

Helpforce worked alongside the hospital on planning and liaison across the project, developing volunteer roles and a 'blueprint' for other health organisations that want to set up similar volunteer services at scale. The charity also measured the impact of the Pathway, ensuring it met its ambitious goals. The Helpforce Back to Health framework provided the foundation for the Pathway, identifying how volunteers can help patients: **wait well** before they get into treatment; **get well** more quickly while they're in hospital; **recover well** when they're back home; and then go on to **live well** and healthily in their community.

How does Back to Health work?

The George Eliot Back to Health Pathway works through a series of connected volunteer services:

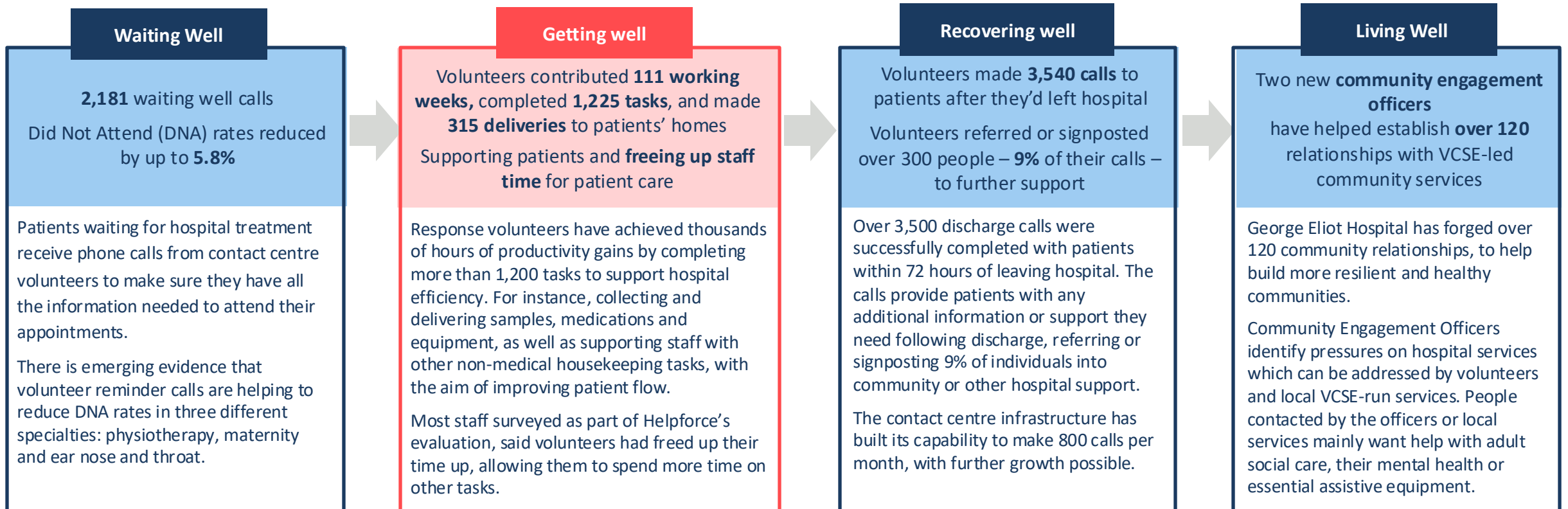
- **Waiting well:** volunteers based in a contact centre call patients on waiting lists, helping to remove any barriers to attending diagnostic or treatment appointments, like finding transport or identifying a more suitable appointment time.
- **Getting well:** hospital response volunteers collect urgent pathology samples and medication to help patients' treatment journey and ensure they can go home as soon as they're fit. And staff time is freed up because of the tasks volunteers carry out.
- **Recovering well:** volunteers make discharge calls to patients after they get home to check they're OK, referring them to community or hospital services if they need help with their recovery.
- **Living well:** the Pathway identifies pressures within the system and Community Engagement Officers work with local communities to find volunteering solutions to help address them.



Feedback loop: insight from the Pathway is fed back into the system to improve services. Within the hospital, this could be about improving the appointment booking system or, via the Back to Health Nurse (see page 5), about improving patient experience. In the community, follow up is focused on the most deprived areas. The insight from former patients' problems and issues helps inform the development of services, contributing to reductions in health inequalities.

What was Back to Health's impact?

- **Organisational impact:** The George Eliot Hospital team proved it's possible to deliver volunteering services at scale, supporting **over 40,000 patients** in two years, and reaching out from the hospital into the community.
- **Patient experience:** tens of thousands of patients get **extra direct support and care** from Pathway volunteers or from VCSE-led services in the community.
- **Staff experience:** Most staff agreed that volunteers improve their working lives, enabling them to **spend more time helping patients** and helping them to feel less stressed when they are busy.
- **Volunteer experience:** Volunteers report that contributing to the Pathway allows them to give back, gives them a **sense of purpose** and uses their existing skills. And they are confident their time spent volunteering benefits others.



Lessons from the Back to Health Pathway

Volunteering at scale

The BtHP demonstrates how integration of volunteer services into a single pathway can deliver high impact at scale to tens of thousands of patients. Helpforce has developed a Pathway service blueprint which we can apply to other health organisations wanting to join up their volunteering services, including service specifications, role description, training models and template communication material.

The six Pathway success factors:



Volunteers and volunteering

The hospital team established inclusive recruitment strategies, offered training, worked collaboratively with volunteers, and built a supportive volunteering culture. This ensures volunteers have an enjoyable and purposeful volunteering experience.



Community engagement

Forging links with community services ensures support is accessible to those in need while waiting for treatment or after discharge. Community Engagement Officers work directly with the community and with VCSE organisations in line with CORE20PLUS5 priorities to reduce healthcare inequalities.



Back to Health Nurse

The Back to Health Nurse provides key clinical input and quality assurance, builds clinical relationships across the hospital, and maximises the value of the volunteer data insights to improve patient experience.



Data driven

From the inception of the Pathway, different types and sources of data were used highlight areas of the patient journey that could be improved, informing decision making and service design.



Project management and governance

A dedicated Project Manager supported project delivery and development. They also set-up the steering group of representatives from across Warwickshire North Place, to ensure successful implementation, integration and governance.



Insight and impact

Capturing insight and impact data plays an essential role in understanding the difference the Pathway makes, meets governance reporting requirements, and provides evidence for future investment and sustainment.

What's next for the Back to Health Pathway?

The Back to Health Pathway continues to grow and develop at George Eliot Hospital, with plans for **further expansion** and **additional services** across Warwickshire North Place.



Scaling contact centre activity and optimising the benefits of calling patients on waiting lists to reduce DNAs with the support of **Deep Medical**, a company that uses Artificial Intelligence to predict appointment non-attendance and therefore prioritise patient call lists to those most likely to not attend.

Vulnerable people and those from marginalised groups are more likely to miss appointments, delaying diagnosis and treatment, so having an increasingly focused service is likely to **impact on health inequalities**.



Asset building - Continuing to support and build on existing community services that can provide support that will optimise patients' health outcomes. For example, AmbaCare, who provide a 12-week **Shape up for Surgery** programme, supporting patients to meet pre-surgery goals. In collaboration with the hospital, AmbaCare are recruiting wellbeing volunteers to allow them to deliver these services.



Patient flow - The volunteering team continue to review opportunities for extending existing services supporting patient flow. For example, they are participating in the **Helpforce Adopt and Adapt** process to introduce mealtime support volunteers, who provide companionship and support during meals.

This role has been proved to increase efficiencies, reduce staff stress and improve patient nutrition.

What people told us about the Pathway

“The Back to Health Pathway is helping George Eliot support patients whilst they are on our waiting list and after they have been discharged from the hospital. This enables us to become better anchored in our local communities, to have a better understanding of hyper local needs and to build stronger, more resilient communities that ultimately, will place less pressure on the health and care systems.”

Jenni Northcote, Chief Strategy, Improvement and Partnerships Officer, George Eliot NHS Hospital Trust

“I have received many thanks during my time at the George Eliot Hospital from people I have guided to wards, and from staff on wards that I have collected samples for quickly. The fact they thanked me made it worth it as I know my help was able to make their stay much easier. And the staff’s job just that little bit easier as well.”

Volunteer



“[the] volunteer in ED is part of our team he looks after our staff and patient with kindness and compassion.”

Registered nurse

“Volunteers are so lovely. They greet everyone with the same respect and caring. Thank goodness there are lovely people like this that are willing to help others. It is very much appreciated.”

Hospital patient

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George Eliot Hospital
NHS Trust

Thank you

help@helpforce.community

www.helpforce.community

If you want to know more, you can read the full *Back to Health Pathway* report about the project and evaluation findings [here](#).