

helpforce

A guide to:

**Northern Health and Social Care
Trust (NHSCT) -**

Bereavement comfort call
volunteer service



Contents



Overview

How this guide will help you 3

About the service 4

The service's achievements 5

Service principles 7

Family & friends pathway 8

Considerations for adopting a similar service

 10

Developing the service 11

Setting up systems and infrastructure 14

Operating the service 16

Managing volunteers 18

Supervising volunteers 20

Measuring impact 22

How this guide will help you

In this guide we describe the bereavement comfort call volunteer service designed and tested by NHSC and offers advice on how you can adapt it to work in your location.

It will help you decide if a similar service would benefit your organisation, and to consider how to adapt the service to your environment.

Adapting and adopting an existing volunteer service model provides great value in terms of knowing that it is tried and tested. You can learn from other organisations' experiences and best practice is already established. Having evidence of a similar service's impact can also help you get buy-in from key stakeholders in your organisation.

However, understanding how to make an existing service fit into a new environment can be a challenge. Adapting the service is an essential step in making sure it will work in a new location.



About the service

NHSCT in Northern Ireland developed its bereavement comfort call volunteer service to further enhance bereavement support for loved ones of those who die in hospital. The service helps bereaved families and friends and provides a contact point, support and signposting to other services.

After somebody dies in hospital within the NHSCT area, a volunteer will make contact within 3-7 days to offer condolences and support. Bereaved families are given information on practical issues and on grief and bereavement, and can be sent a bereavement pack. The service also provides signposting to voluntary and community support organisations, and offers families the option of a follow-up call by the Trust chaplaincy service.



The service's achievements

The service was originally set up as a response to changes during the Covid-19 pandemic, and was developed and implemented within six weeks.

Families have appreciated the comfort calls and the support offered. The service aims to provide a number of benefits:

- ▣ Families and carers can access additional support after the death of a family member.
- ▣ Families and carers are comforted and feel fully supported by the Trust.
- ▣ Staff have confidence in the quality of the service that volunteers are helping to deliver.
- ▣ Staff have confidence in the added value of volunteering services.
- ▣ Volunteers believe that they're making a positive impact.



70%
% of volunteers
think the service
provides a very good
or good experience for
families/carers.



62%
of volunteers
say they're extremely
likely or likely to
recommend volunteering
to friends and family.

Volunteers overwhelmingly agreed that volunteering gives them a sense of purpose and increases their desire to take in activities that benefit their local community.

The service's achievements

““”

“[The volunteer] gave me time and space and did not pressure me to answer and didn't hurry me. Since I lifted the phone and had this lovely chat, you don't know the relief I feel inside, like a weight lifted off my shoulder.”

FAMILY MEMBER HELPED BY THE SERVICE

““”

“Making bereavement comfort calls can be quite draining but the benefits being offered to next of kin are very well received, which gives me a feeling of being helpful in my role as a volunteer and that I am doing something really useful.”

VOLUNTEER

““”

“The Covid-19 pandemic did present us with challenges, but the hard work and dedication of the team involved resulted in a very worthwhile and necessary service that provided such valuable support to families faced with bereavement. The bereavement comfort call volunteers are such an inspiring group of people and I feel honoured to have supported them in their role.”

VOLUNTEER CO-ORDINATOR

““”

“I love my volunteering role with the Trust. I think the service we provide is needed and almost always well received. The opportunity has given me more confidence and the team have been a super support.”

VOLUNTEER

Service principles

NHSCT's bereavement comfort call service principles spell out the essence of the service and help guide how it's developed and managed, so it remains true to its original intent.

Working in partnership

The service continually works to connect with internal and external stakeholders to enhance support for bereaved people.

For example, Trust ICT staff supported the service to set up secure system for transfer of data, while the information team and governance department provide daily data relating to hospital deaths. The corporate communications department has helped develop literature to promote the service, and the Trust's volunteer service supports with quarterly newsletters and recognition and celebration events.

Embedding practices for capturing impact

It is essential for service development to measure the impact the service is having. Measuring levels of satisfaction/confidence for staff, volunteers, friends and family provides valuable feedback to inform service development and quality improvement.

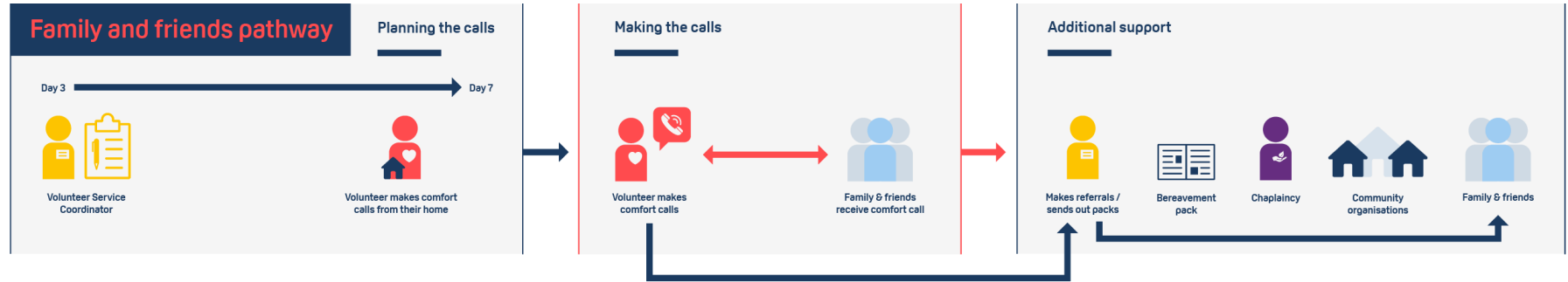
Supporting and supervising volunteers

The service recognises the challenges and sensitivities of the role, and that it may be challenging, providing appropriate supervision to help.

Recognising the needs of bereaved people

Volunteers are trained to support bereaved people, recognising the benefits of reaching out to provide practical advice and compassionate support at an early stage of their journey.

Family & friends pathway



Following a patient death in the Trusts’s hospital, volunteers are asked to complete a bereavement comfort call to the next of kin.

Each call is expected to take place between three and seven days after death. Volunteers undertake their role from home, making calls Monday to Friday, between 11am and 7pm.

Volunteers usually make between two and four calls per week – the individual volunteer tells the service coordinator how many calls they can take on.

The primary aim of the call is for the volunteer to offer condolences and a listening ear, but they also check whether the next of kin received a ‘bereavement pack’ on the ward when their loved one died. If they didn’t, the volunteer arranges for one to be sent to them.

Volunteers are also asked to consider if the next of kin would like a follow-up call from the Chaplaincy Service, and if they would benefit from being signposted to an appropriate bereavement voluntary or community organisation.

In the case of voluntary or community services, the volunteer either provides the next of kin with the relevant contact details or, with their permission, asks the service coordinator to make a referral. In the case of the chaplaincy service, the volunteer highlights this to the coordinator who will pass on a referral form.

Supporting the family & friends pathway

Volunteers working with staff

1. The service is partnering with community organisations to build pathways for referrals and to develop volunteers' knowledge about effective signposting. Bereavement Care volunteer training and is included in monthly volunteer group supervision sessions.
2. The service developed a communication plan to help promote and raise awareness of the new service.
3. To ensure the call isn't completely unexpected, a service leaflet is included in bereavement packs, with contact details to reach the bereavement coordinator.
4. Awareness-raising with teams in the Trust has encouraged them to mention the call when speaking with families.

Systems and processes

1. Volunteer Services Manager developed the DPIA in consultation with Information Governance.
1. Senior Trust staff from the mental health division provided advice, support and approval to develop a process for volunteers for dealing with a distressed person.
2. Effective training and awareness sessions for the volunteers/staff keep the service and its quality at the forefront of people's minds.
3. Volunteer Co-Ordinator ensures service consistency and balances the needs of the service, for example, ensuring the referral process is running well and deploying the volunteers.
4. Supervision is a critical part of looking after the wellbeing of the volunteers and reducing turnover. This is an emotionally challenging role and volunteers benefit from the opportunity to reflect as well as share best practice and learn.
5. A steering group provides a platform for engagement, good governance and continuous improvement. The group includes a palliative care lead, clinical staff, third sector representation, the volunteer team and volunteers themselves.



Implementing and operating a similar service:

top tips checklists resources



Developing the service

If you're considering a new project, your first step should be planning work to lay the foundations of an effective service. Think through the people and systems you'll need to run the service you have in mind.

- 1** **Get buy-in.** Start by getting the right people involved. Who needs to back the project in your organisation? Support from senior stakeholders is usually important. Who needs to be involved in developing, running, promoting and evaluating the service, how and when? At NHSCT, key stakeholders included volunteers, the volunteer coordinator, senior leadership, ward sisters, charge nurses, funding partners, the Trust information/data and ICT teams, the service user experience team and the mental health team.
- 2** **Be flexible with project planning.** Put together a project plan and take a flexible approach. Allow time and space to reflect on learning gathered in the early stages, and to make changes based on this – test, review and revise. Make sure your plan includes the scale and scope of the new service, and budget and resources needed.
- 3** **Understand the context.** It's important to understand why this service is being set up and how it supports your organisation's strategic and operational priorities. This will help you set out a realistic project plan and timeline.
- 4** **Establish a steering group.** Try to set up an active group made up of key stakeholders to oversee the development of your project, generate ideas, overcome barriers and make decisions. Members could include volunteer managers, volunteers, clinical staff and executive level roles, to make sure you get a full and balanced view about how your service should develop and improve.

Developing the service

If you're considering a new project, your first step should be planning work to lay the foundations of an effective service. Think through the people and systems you'll need to run the service you have in mind.

5

Appoint a project manager. If resources allow, employ a dedicated service coordinator to develop and deliver the service.

6

Collaborate with other departments- ICT were consulted on data management.

7

Partner with community organisations. At NHSCT, collaboration with Cruse Bereavement Care and other community support organisations locally has helped build pathways for referrals and develop the team's knowledge about effective signposting.

8

Provide training. Both staff and volunteers at NHSCT have received training in using secure systems, along with bereavement training

DEVELOPING THE SERVICE

Key steps: checklist

- Know your organisation's key strategic and operational priorities
 - Agree how the service will meet strategic priorities
 - Agree on the scale and scope of your new service
 - Confirm the budget and resources needed
 - Identify key stakeholders/support team for implementation and wider ongoing service development and support
 - Run workshops to co-design and develop ideas for your new service
- Produce an implementation/project plan and risk register covering:
 - Systems and infrastructure
 - Operations (including an engagement plan)
 - Volunteer management
 - Measuring impact
 - Identify and develop new policies you may need

Resources

What are service principles?

What are core components?

Setting up systems and infrastructure

Another important step in setting up your new volunteering service is to consider the resources you need, and the processes you need to put in place to make it work efficiently.

1

Think about equipment and resources. Will your service need a space to operate from? Will you need IT equipment? Will staff and volunteers need training on how to use equipment? NHSCT's service uses various technology tools, including a secure IT system for the transfer of call data. WhatsApp for communication with volunteers, and Zoom for training and supervision. The need for remote working during Covid-19 influenced the development of many of these processes and systems.

2

Consider your referral process carefully. How will people be referred to your service? Simplifying your approach will help you overcome barriers to people using systems and processes. For example, a simple, quick phone call to make a referral will often be the most effective process, instead of asking clinical staff to fill in a form.

3

Research volunteer management systems. A volunteer management system might be useful. This will hold all the information about your volunteers in one place, including rotas, contact information and data about how the service is performing. Research the platforms available to find a product that meets your service's needs and will comply with your organisation's IT policy. Once you have a system in place, you'll need to allow time for staff training and data inputting.

4

Set up robust administrative processes. It's important to capture, record and evaluate information efficiently, while meeting data protection requirements. In the Northern Trust a data processing impact assessment was carried out when the service was set up. The service worked in partnership with the regional Electronic Care Record computer system to register when calls were completed while respecting the confidentiality of families.

SETTING UP SYSTEMS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Key steps: checklist

- Decide where your service will be based and how the space will be equipped
- Identify what systems and technology are already in use/available and if they meet the needs of this service, for example:
 - Volunteer management system
 - Bleeper systems
 - Mobile phones
 - Data capture tools
 - Laptops
- Consider your budget and then specify the hardware you need
- Consider the lead time on equipment arriving and being set up
- Design your referral process, including the systems, and communicate this to staff teams
- Arrange training for staff and volunteers who will be using the systems and equipment

Resources

[Bereavement information leaflet](#)

Operating the service

Understanding the budget, people, systems and processes you need to manage your service once it's live is essential.

- 1 Consider your budget.** Your primary costs will be salaries for the key people involved in the project. Other costs could include volunteer recruitment, training and admin support.
- 2 Prioritise staff engagement.** It's important to commit time to engaging with staff to discuss your service, share its impact and encourage staff to refer to it. NHSC service works hard to engage ward sisters and charge nurses to raise awareness of the service and ensure next-of-kin data is recorded accurately.
- 3 Have a dedicated project role to lead.** Services tend to work best with a dedicated project manager, who can promote the service, support volunteers, act as a central point for continuous improvement, and manage referrals. Be clear about the service coordinator's responsibilities – from the referral process, through scheduling calls, to signposting – to ensure all processes run smoothly.
- 4 Market the service.** NHSC service distributed information leaflets to wards to raise awareness of the service. The leaflets were also included in bereavement packs sent to next of kin.
- 5 Ask yourself key questions.** How will you balance demand for the service with recruitment, training and scheduling of new volunteers? How will you build demand for your service to ensure that it's sustainable? Who are your main sponsors in your organisation and how can they help you?
- 6 Have a clear leadership structure.** NHSC appointed a senior director as chair of the steering group, which meets monthly. The volunteer coordinator provides reports with qualitative and quantitative data. The Trust bereavement coordinator has a monthly supervision and accountability meeting with the service coordinator, with weekly check-ins.
- 7 Form strong partnerships.** Partners with a Bereavement Care organization supported monthly supervision sessions for volunteers, along with the service coordinator and the Trust bereavement coordinator.

OPERATING THE SERVICE

Key steps: checklist

- Define the reporting structure for your service
- Produce a communications and marketing plan to raise awareness of your service
- Produce a service delivery plan and update it regularly
- Manage an active task force/steering group
- Develop your approach to managing the service. You'll need to consider:
 - Stakeholder engagement plan
 - Volunteer recruitment plan
 - Volunteer induction and training package delivery
 - Governance structure
 - Communications and marketing plan
 - Reporting structure and frequency
 - Scheduling of volunteer shifts
 - Documentation for department/ward staff

Resources

Promotional information

Managing volunteers

Managing and supporting volunteers effectively is key to the success of your service. Handling volunteers well will mean they continue to give their time, and the service will have a more experienced, skilled and confident volunteering team.

It's important to think about every stage of a volunteer's journey, from their decision to volunteer through to training, induction, ongoing support and day to day engagement.

1

Create a supportive environment and promote volunteers' wellbeing. This is essential to ensure the quality of your service. Volunteers should be invited to share their challenges and successes and actively feed into how the service operates and improves.

2

Provide effective training. Consider what training volunteers need to provide a great service, and how you can give them it. NHSCT volunteers receive the Trust Volunteer welcome, induction and training, which includes safeguarding, confidentiality and data management. Bereavement Care service provides a half-day training on grief and bereavement. Further optional training opportunities offered to volunteers include communication skills training from Sage and Thyme.

3

Be flexible. Allowing volunteers flexibility with the hours they commit will help with recruitment and support existing volunteers who need to fit volunteering around their work and home life.

4

Create clear and concise volunteer coordinator and volunteer roles. Develop these role descriptions and person specifications at the beginning of the project.

5

Recruit from your current base of volunteers. This is a good place to start as they're already familiar with and committed to your Trust.

6

Look at other recruitment routes. NHSCT has recruited from local community groups/services and organisations.

7

Ensure volunteer representation on the steering group. At NHSCT, volunteer representative on the steering group helped to raise issues, queries and feedback from the volunteers' experience and perspective, which has informed service development. Feedback suggests volunteers find the role satisfying, while acknowledging the challenging aspects of making calls.

MANAGING VOLUNTEERS

Key steps: checklist

- Agree on a set of volunteer tasks, responsibilities and boundaries
- Produce a volunteer role description
- Develop your volunteer recruitment plan
- Design your volunteer training package
- Develop your volunteer supervision and communication and engagement plan
- Involve clinical staff in training delivery
- Meet regularly with clinical staff to grow their support and working relationships with the volunteers
- Offer regular one-to-one support sessions for your volunteers
- Encourage reflective practice and sharing of ideas

Resources

[Volunteer role description](#)

Supervising volunteers

Specialist volunteer supervision is important for volunteers who are handling emotionally challenging situations. Some aspects of the role may be hard to process or bring up personal experiences.

1 Consider what format supervision should take. At NHSCT, volunteers are invited to a monthly group supervision session over Zoom, and communicate regularly over WhatsApp. During their scheduled hours for making calls, they can contact the volunteer coordinator (during working hours) or the Trust bereavement coordinator (at other times) for support. They also each receive a supervision phone call after their first bereavement call, then a review after one month and three months to check how they are settling into the role.

2 Build in time for reflective practice. Bereavement volunteers handle emotionally challenging situations, and aspects of the role may be hard to process or bring up personal experiences. Volunteers can be encouraged to keep a reflective journal to capture their experiences for personal reflection and/or to prepare for supervision sessions.

SUPERVISING VOLUNTEERS

Key steps: checklist

- Encourage reflective practice and sharing of ideas
- Develop your volunteer supervision plan, e.g. 1:1, peer group
- Where will you be able to offer a safe space for individual reflection?
- How to provide the opportunity for group learning and development?
- What supervision sessions will volunteers be expected to attend?
- How will the learning from the supervision sessions be recorded and shared for wider learning by the team and departments?

Measuring impact

It's important to collate data and feedback, to refine and improve your service as well as prove its impact. This can help ensure ongoing organisational support and/or funding for your service.

1

Consider your service's intended impact to help decide what outcomes and ultimate goals to measure. You should do this important thinking and planning in the early stages of designing a new service or adopting an existing service.

2

Consider what evidence you need and how to gather it. It should show that your volunteers and the service are making a difference to family/friends, staff, volunteers themselves and your organisation.

3

Create your own outcome model and design how you will improve and evaluate your volunteering initiative. You can get started using Helpforce's [Insight & Impact \(I&I\)](#) service which provides:

- ▣ Access to pre-built outcome templates
- ▣ Guidance on designing your evaluation and how to collect data, demonstrate impact against outcome measures and obtain insights to support continuous service improvement
- ▣ Expertise and support to set up your target outcomes, collect the right data, and translate that data into robust evidence findings

4

Understand your key strategic and operational priorities. It's important to identify the measures that will best demonstrate the impact and benefits of the service on these priorities.

5

Capture volunteer activity and feedback. Ask volunteers to fill in simple activity sheets so you can determine how many people they supported and what activities they engaged in. The sheets will also help you collate feedback from staff, families, friends and the volunteers themselves, and to gauge volunteer satisfaction after each session.

Measuring impact

It's important to collate data and feedback, to refine and improve your service as well as prove its impact. This can help ensure ongoing organisational support and/or funding for your service.

6

Capture key figures. Record your:

- ☐ Number of volunteers
- ☐ Number of volunteer hours
- ☐ Number of people supported

7

Ask key evaluation questions for the project. These could include:

- ☐ Does the service support staff in delivering good care to family/friends?
- ☐ Does volunteer support contribute to staff wellbeing?
- ☐ Do staff feel satisfied with the support provided by volunteers?
- ☐ Do volunteers feel that volunteering has had an impact on their wellbeing?

8

Make sure your data is robust. It's vital that the data you collect is robust and valid. You should test systems and processes for robustness, and provide effective training for those involved in collating data.

MEASURING IMPACT

Key steps: checklist

- Create an outcome model – this will help you to plan effectively
- Agree the service impact measures
- Establish a control group or baseline data to demonstrate the impact of your service
- Define the measures that will support continued investment and growth of the service

Resources

[Helpforce impact and insight guidance including theory of change](#)

Thank you

For more service guides visit [here](#)

All photos shown for illustration purposes only and were taken before the Covid-19 pandemic.
Please note: None of the photos were taken at organisations that were part of this programme.

helpforce

help@helpforce.community
www.helpforce.community

Helpforce Community is a Community Interest Company, No: 10919485