

PARTICIPATION IN ACTION



Young volunteers provide an open ear to improve older people's health and wellbeing

Name Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

Provider HelpForce

Summary Works with NHS trusts to improve volunteering practice and make a positive difference for patients, volunteers and NHS staff

Across the country, NHS staff are under pressure. In addition, many patients – particularly those in later life – lack a support network or family to provide companionship. Well-trained young volunteers can play an important role in supporting patients and staff, and help relieve the strain on the health service.

Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust is working with HelpForce, a new organisation working with volunteers to improve the health and wellbeing of people across the country, to help integrate young volunteers into the hospital environment, and develop and test new interventions.

What I've seen in the past few months is an immediate difference to the everyday wellbeing of people across the hospital – staff, patients, and the volunteers themselves. My colleague, Lynn McCormack, volunteer and charity development manager at Northumbria Healthcare, agrees. "For many years, our volunteers at Northumbria have been at the heart of what we do, tirelessly and generously giving their time to benefit our patients and staff," she explains. "Young people have an incredible amount to offer society and we're working with HelpForce as we're passionate about opening up opportunities to help volunteers develop and gain an insight into life in the NHS."

Young volunteers play a valuable role. It is so important that patients, particularly older people, have company while they're in hospital.

"We're passionate about opening up opportunities to help volunteers develop and gain an insight into life in the NHS"

Lynn McCormack, volunteer and charity development manager, Northumbria Healthcare



Volunteers provide important support to patients and staff at Northumbria Healthcare NHS foundation Trust

Simple activities such as chatting about old times, playing cards or reading out loud can all help to improve their health and wellbeing, and have a positive impact on their recovery. Intergenerational interaction is particularly beneficial for older patients.

The young volunteers I work with play a key role in assisting those travelling to and from hospital, talking to them as they wait for transport, and keeping spirits high. Properly co-ordinated volunteer teams can help reduce the pressures on staff and the NHS, and the feedback from our staff is consistently fantastic. The young volunteer service, although in its infancy, is making a huge difference to patients, and makes us think about how we do things.

Committed forms of social action over an extended period can play a critical role in developing a young person's life chances, improving job prospects and wellbeing. Volunteering also improves self-esteem and social engagement for young people themselves.

Recent research by The Royal Voluntary Service found that readmission rates dropped to 9.2 per cent for the over-75s supported by volunteers in a Hospital to Home scheme, compared with national average of 15 per cent.

HelpForce is aiming to help double the number of volunteers in the NHS by 2021. Despite the fact that more than 78,000 people currently volunteer with acute NHS trusts, they are rarely integrated into NHS strategies or service delivery plans. We want to help change

My View

James Grieves, 17

"I started volunteering when I heard about it through my school. As a volunteer, my main job is chatting with people and giving them company. In Northumbria, we have quite a lot of people with dementia, which means I listen more than speak.

The ward I'm on has lots of elderly people who all have lots of different stories and life experiences. You can really tell it makes a difference for them to have someone to talk to. Especially because I often come at visiting hours, when not everyone has visitors. Hospitals can sometimes feel quite clinical, so making that extra effort to show people that you care emotionally makes a real difference.

It can be very rewarding to end up surrounded by people and I have learned a lot. The media often talks about the NHS failing, but volunteering has taught me that hospitals are full of good people."

that, so that volunteering is recognised and supported as a strategic priority.

Young people can give an enormous amount back to the NHS, and find it hugely rewarding and empowering to get involved.

By Michael Porter, project support officer, Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

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