


How to create a **pathway for volunteers** **to NHS careers**

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What is a pathway for volunteers to NHS careers?

A pathway for volunteers to NHS careers is a streamlined process that provides volunteers with the right support to seek employment within the NHS.

Why do we need one?

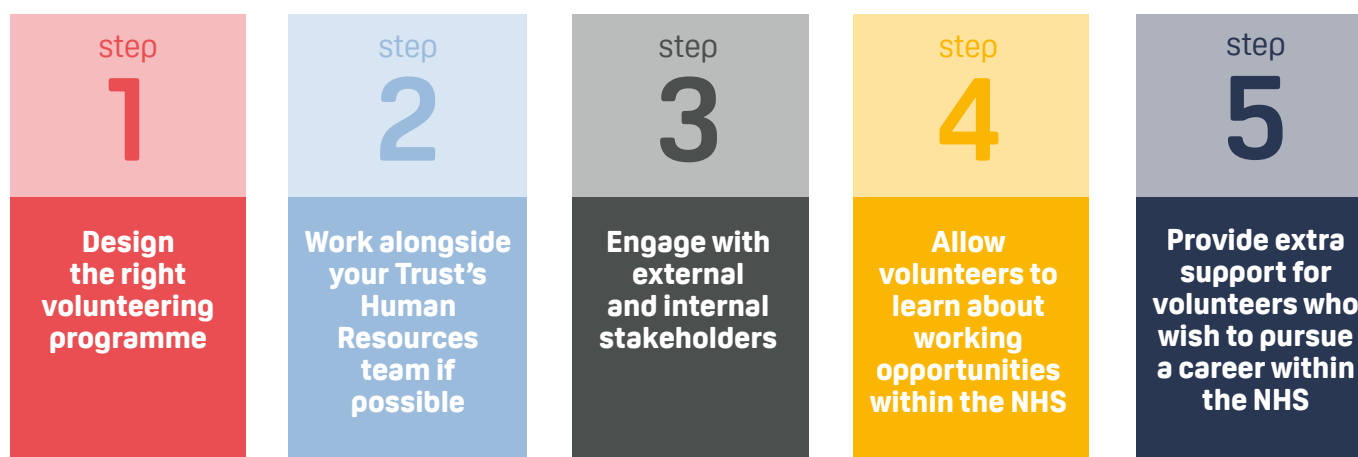
According to the King's Fund report "The healthcare workforce in England" (2018), it was estimated that there was a shortage of more than 100,000 staff. By 2030, this figure could increase up to 230,000 and if "the emerging trend of staff leaving the workforce early continues and the pipeline of newly trained staff and international recruits does not rise sufficiently, this number could be more than 350,000 by 2030." (The King's Fund, 2018).

Within this context, the NHS produced an Interim People Plan last year to address the challenges and outline solutions for this shortage. In the document, it recognised the contribution of volunteers to the health and care system and aimed to "make volunteering a more attractive option for individuals wanting to contribute to local healthcare services and potentially gain permanent employment in the NHS, helping them develop some of the skills, confidence and experience they need." (NHS's Interim People Plan, p.51, 2019).

By building a pathway for volunteers to NHS careers, you will help to address the staff shortages and provide the NHS with a talented, caring, and compassionate workforce, who have a good understanding of the system and what they could do to make a difference to the health and wellbeing of the community.



Key steps to build a career pathway



step

1

Design the right volunteering programme

It's important that you understand your volunteers' preference for where they would like to help and make sure that they feel fully supported by the relevant team. If a volunteer is not sure which role to choose you could have a rotation programme where they can volunteer for different departments within a year. This model has been working successfully at the Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust, where new volunteers can try different roles before deciding which one they like the most.

If a volunteer is interested in pursuing a career with the NHS, you could offer shadowing opportunities with clinical or non-clinical professionals.

It's important that the volunteering programme helps volunteers to see the difference that they make. Therefore, where possible, think about ways in which you could show volunteers how much their contribution is valued by the service.

In addition, you need to ask volunteers to commit to certain hours per week as this not only provides consistency and reliability for the service, but also helps volunteers bond with the team and gain a deep understanding of how the service runs. At Isle of Wight NHS Trust, students are asked to commit to 12 hours per week, and four hours for adult volunteers.

If it's possible, think about setting up a peer-to-peer support programme where you can match a new volunteer with an experienced volunteer so they feel supported and are confident to ask help from their fellow volunteers.

step

2

Work alongside the HR team

If possible you should work alongside the HR team within your organisation. When a volunteer expresses an interest in pursuing a career within health and care, the HR team can offer support and advice, along with information about job vacancies, apprenticeships and qualifications.



step

3

Engage with external and internal stakeholders

Engaging with external stakeholders:

Once you have a programme designed, you should approach external organisations to establish a partnership with them and to provide opportunities for local volunteer recruitment. These may include colleges, universities, charities and local authorities.

Colleges and universities may provide opportunities for their students to volunteer with your Trust for at least a year. This is similar to a work placement and the commitment for a year enables students to understand more about the role they are considering and builds their confidence for working within the NHS. This model has been very successful at Isle of Wight NHS Trust and Isle of Wight college, where Health and Social Care students commit to volunteering at their local hospital for a year.

In addition, you could explore the possibility of working with the local job centre and offering jobseekers a chance to volunteer within your organisation, providing further support should they wish to pursue a career within the NHS. At South Tees NHS Trust the PROSPECT programme offers unemployed individuals the chance to volunteer for the Trust for 30 hours per week for a 12 week period. Volunteers on this scheme then move onto the Therapeutic care (TC) support worker apprenticeship scheme for 18 months (if suitable) and are given priority for TC support worker vacancies.

Lastly, you should aim to run regular engagement sessions with target groups, for example students or members of the public, to remind people about the volunteering opportunities that you can offer them.



Engaging with internal stakeholders:

It's important that you communicate clearly with the team managers or ward managers about the responsibilities that they and volunteers need to fulfill. This is to ensure that volunteers are able to provide the appropriate help and that they will be fully supported by the staff. You can have these responsibilities written down and signed by managers and volunteers.

When organising mandatory training for volunteers, you could ask new staff to join the training so they could get to know the volunteers.

step

4

**Allow
volunteers to
learn about
available
opportunities
working within
the NHS**

The NHS offers tremendous working opportunities and a wide variety of roles. You should think about working together with the Careers Service to organise events where volunteers can learn more about the career opportunities available to them within the NHS. Could they be working in laboratories, estates, communications, radiography, etc.?

Invite clinical and non-clinical staff to come to the events. Many staff are passionate about sharing their knowledge and experience to help build the workforce of the future.



step

5

**Provide extra
support**

Volunteers with the experience of supporting the Trust could offer invaluable skills and insights. However, they could find it difficult to demonstrate their skills on an application form. You could work with the Careers service to offer workshops where they can learn how best to present their skills and knowledge, or to practise their interview skills.

Common challenges:

Volunteers may have unrealistic expectations when coming onto the wards, such as wanting to care for patients, or helping to move patients. It is important that you have clear guidelines explaining what volunteers can and cannot do and communicate these with staff as well as patients and their families.

A lack of commitment to volunteering hours could pose a high risk. Therefore, it's important that you engage with your volunteers regularly to ensure that they feel needed and are encouraged to keep to their commitment.

Mass applications for popular volunteer roles can sometimes be a challenge and you could consider a simplified recruitment system or planning for extra support to help with the process.

Top tips

- Pick the right time to approach schools and colleges, perhaps to coincide with the new intake in September
- Be flexible with volunteering hours to support students and people with families and work commitments
- Be as clear as possible about the volunteer recruitment process with volunteers and partner organisations such as schools and colleges
- Set clear expectations for volunteers, letting them know that volunteering experience could help with job applications but is not a guarantee of future career opportunities.

Case study

Example sections

Case study:

Therapeutic Support Programme at South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

The Therapeutic care programme was introduced to improve the management of patients that present with challenging and escalating behaviour. The team has over 500 volunteers, and in recent years 327 volunteers have been supported into paid roles and higher education.

Many volunteers have praised the programme for giving them the confidence and experience to apply for different roles within the NHS, such as healthcare assistant, physiotherapist, nursing, medicine, etc.

Under the leadership of Debi McKeown, lead nurse for therapeutic support, the staff, volunteers and work experience students – aged from 16 to 82 – provide valuable therapeutic support to patients, visitors and staff throughout the Trust.

The volunteers support patients with a wide range of activities, from playing board games, dominoes and crafts to pampering activities such as nail painting and hair dressing. Volunteers may also find themselves running errands for patients and taking them for short trips away from the wards where appropriate so they can experience life outside the ward.

The success of the programme is based on a number of factors:

1. Having a good relationship with internal and external stakeholders

Debi's clinical background has helped raise the profile of the programme within the Trust, which has then enabled the team to secure the resources needed to develop the programme further.

The volunteer recruitment programme is supported by the NHS Trac system and the staff team is well established with four admin posts, six senior support workers and 42 support workers (not all full time posts).

Volunteers complete their mandatory training alongside new employees so that staff are aware of the role of volunteers and the skills and support they can offer. This early engagement with staff often leads to collaboration opportunities in the future.

As a nurse ambassador Debi has developed successful external relationships and **runs regular sessions in local schools** to encourage students to consider NHS careers. She also maintains a good relationship with local Further Education and Higher Education institutions, such as Middlesbrough College, Teesside University and Project Choice, an internship programme supported by Health Education England. In addition, the programme works in partnership with various other organisations, for example:

- Age UK
- Backstreet Drama Group
- Cause Campaign
- Colleges/Sixth Forms Schools:
 - Redcar & Cleveland College
 - Middlesbrough College
 - Stockton Riverside College
 - Inspire to Learn Events
 - Leo's
 - MIMA Art Gallery, Middlesbrough
- Middlesbrough Community Learning
- National Literacy Trust
- NCS – National Citizen Service
- Primary Schools :
 - Easterside Primary School
 - St Alphonsus Primary School
 - St Edwards Primary School
 - St Thomas Mores Primary School
- Psychiatric Liaison Team – World Delirium Day
- Secondary Schools
- Specialist Schools
 - Beverley School
 - Kirkleatham School
 - KTS Academy
 - Priory Woods
 - Teesside University
 - Wag & co

2. Offering diverse recruitment channels. Volunteers for the programme come via various routes with the following being the most popular:

- From the University of South Tees: the programme works closely with the university where psychology students are supported to volunteer on the ward as part of their studies.
- From the PROSPECT programme: a joint initiative between the Trust and their local Job Centre, where unemployed individuals can volunteer for the Trust 30 hours per week for 12 weeks. If suitable, the volunteers then move on to complete the Therapeutic Care worker apprenticeship scheme for 18 months and will be given priority for Therapeutic Care support worker vacancies.

3. Providing a seamless process to support volunteers seeking employment

When volunteers express an interest in seeking employment within the NHS, the programme offers opportunities to shadow relevant clinical or non-clinical staff to gain hands-on experience.

Building an apprenticeship programme also helps volunteers to gain the right qualification, skills, and experience to apply for a paid job in the future.

4. Building a strong relationship within the team

The programme uses different means to engage with volunteers, even after they leave the role, such as social media (mainly Facebook), newsletters, fun activities, etc. The Trust's 'Mugging' campaign was a great success - volunteers were given a mug with lots of goodies such as sweets and snacks as a thank you for their support.

Result:

The programme has been able to provide a much-needed boost for the Trust's workforce. Prior to the programme, the Trust spent nearly £1.2m on agency staff, but thanks to volunteer support for patients, permanent staff gained extra time and the need for agency staff on wards was reduced. Of the volunteers moving into paid roles, almost all have been retained within the Trust and a small number have moved into private healthcare.

Video

Video

This is a four-minute video in which Debi McKeown, Lead nurse at Therapeutic Care at South Tees Hospitals NHS Trust, explained how the team works in partnership with Teesside University to deliver the volunteering programme.

<https://youtu.be/JQCWZJday0s>



further reading



Examples from other organisations:

Peterborough City Hospital: <https://www.peterboroughtoday.co.uk/health/young-volunteers-give-time-support-patients-peterborough-city-hospital-2210360>

Isle of Wight Trust: <https://www.islandecho.co.uk/local-nhs-volunteer-service-shortlisted-for-national-helpforce-awards-2019/>



References:

[The King's Fund report](#) "The healthcare workforce in England" (2018)

NHS Improvement, "[Interim NHS People Plan](#)", 2019

South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, "[Annual Report 2018](#)", (2018)

South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, [Training programme](#).

