Is your volunteering service making a difference?

As a volunteering service leader, you are perhaps wondering how your service is performing and how much your service is making a difference to patients, staff and the organisation. It might also be a question in your mind about how you might robustly measure the difference and benefits with your already stretched resources and capacity.

In this blog, I would like to share with you some suggestions that hopefully can give you an idea of where to start with your impact measurement and evaluation journey.

A.   Why should you measure the impact and evaluate your volunteering service?

At Helpforce, we know that measuring impact is important and we strongly believe that it's a practice that all volunteering services should consider. Following the evidence findings from our work with 11 trusts across England through the Volunteering Innovators Programme, we were able to improve the evidence base around health volunteering by demonstrating how volunteers can bring measurable benefits to patients, staff, volunteers and services. The results from the findings have helped many Trusts to secure further investment to continue with these innovations, making greater difference to patients and staff.

Indeed, impact measurement and evaluations tells us not only whether a service worked, but also why and how. Evaluations can also be invaluable to service improvement, and to help sustain or grow the service and investment.

Your evaluation findings can also contribute to the growing evidence around the benefits of health volunteering. And this will help all of us to develop a bigger picture on what is often a complex story.

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> *"We learned so much from collecting data and being able to measure the impact of the project, which will help us deliver the service in the future."*

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> *"Understand the data fully but also sense check against the right stakeholders at a local level to gain that intelligence about what is happening on the ground. This really benefited the project in terms of the direction it took and a change in pilot areas to get the right cohort of patients and maximise the impact."*

B.   How should you start measuring the impact and evaluating your service?

We know evaluations can feel technical, complex and 'not for me' – particularly if it is a new topic. Or perhaps you're familiar with evaluations but need more advice on how to develop a

clear service **logic model** or more guidance on whether the data you've collected is 'good enough'? Whatever your situation, we hope our new free guidance, developed by Nuffield Trust, will help you. The guide will take you through four steps including:

1) Describing how and why your service works:

The guide will prompt you to write down what will change as a result of your service, how and why (in a theory of change).

2) Planning the evaluation with your working group:
The new guidance will show you how to build a working group and think carefully about why you are doing an evaluation.

3) Collecting and analysing data:
We cover how you can collect both stories and numbers, and compare and combine these into evidence.

4) Reflecting on results and reporting your service achievements:
 The guide provides pointers on how you can regularly report your findings and consolidate all of your learning into a summary with recommendations.

For each of the four steps, the guide will walk you through a set of key questions that are grouped together in ten areas such as the 'relevance' of your service to the problem identified, or the or the level of clarity and complexity of your service, etc. If you can answer the questions with confidence then you can be assured that you are on the way to designing a robust impact evaluation.

Can you answer these questions with confidence?

Relevance
- What is the problem your service is trying to solve?
- Is your service relevant to the problem identified?

Step 1

Clarity & Complexity
- Is the service clearly described?
- Are you clear on the service's goals?
- Have you identified short and long-term outcomes?
- Does the target population have boundaries?

Step 1

Stakeholder agreement
- Does your working group have wide representation?
- To what extent does the working group agree on evaluation plans?

Step 2

Plausibility & Sustainability
- Is there a clear timeline?
- Is it likely that the project objectives could be achieved in that timeline?
- What are the service's plans for sustainability?

Step 2

Indicators & Outcomes
- Could the indicators plausibly reflect the expected outcomes?
- Are the expected outcomes realistic?

Step 2

Context
For the service and its evaluation:
- Have internal / external enablers and barriers been identified?
- How will you monitor these?

Step 2

Ethics & Governance
- What approvals will you need for your evaluation?

Step 2

Baselines & Comparisons
- What baseline data will you use?
- Who will form your comparison group?

Step 3

Data collection & Analysis
- How consistent will data collection be? How frequent?
- Will the sample be big enough for quantitative analysis – or would qualitative approaches be better?

Step 3

Reporting
- Will you report findings throughout (for service change) or at the end?
- In what ways can you share your findings with varied audiences?

Step 4

C.   How can you get further help?

We at Helpforce know that impact measurement can be tricky but we hope this guide gives you some inspiration and confidence to give it a go. And if you need further support, we are committed to helping you every step of the way.

You are welcome to join the "Impact and Insight' group on our Helpforce Connect website, which is an informal group that shares knowledge and tips and sparks discussions about this topic. In addition, we will be soon be launching a new 'insight and impact' service to give better support to volunteering service leaders in health and care. If you are keen to learn more or are interested in having our support for your own evaluation, please let us know by emailing insight@helpforce.community.