

Helpforce Companions project at Bush Doctors GP Practice

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the aim of the project?

The aim of the project is to test whether volunteers can carry out useful and fulfilling tasks to support GP practices and their patients. In doing so we hope to demonstrate that they can have a positive impact on patients' health and wellbeing and on the practice itself by releasing pressure on GP appointments. We are calling the volunteers **Helpforce Companions**.



How does the process work?

If a member of the GP staff identifies a patient that they think would benefit from volunteer support, they will refer that patient to the local Social Prescribing Link Worker (SPLW) using the System One database. This will trigger a "task" to be sent to the SPLW.

The SPLW will then connect with the patient and form a view as to how they might be able to assist the patient. If they think there is a role for a volunteer, they will then refer the patient to Urban Partnership Group (UPG) who will arrange for the volunteer support. UPG is working with us as the volunteer management organisation.



Who are Helpforce?

Helpforce was founded in 2016 by Sir Thomas Hughes Hallett, former Chief Executive of Marie Curie and now Chairman of Chelsea and Westminster NHS Foundation Trust. His vision was to harness the power of volunteering to help healthcare professionals and community organisations meet the diverse care and support needs of patients.

Helpforce, with support from the NHS, initially focused on five pilot projects to develop best practice volunteering in hospitals. Their work has now expanded significantly across the country and they run projects in the NHS to help develop new and innovative volunteer roles. To find out more go to <https://www.Helpforce.community/>. Much of Helpforce's work has been in acute settings and this project aims to apply some of Helpforce's expertise around volunteering in hospitals in a primary care setting.

What kind of things will volunteers do?

We think there are many things that a Helpforce Companion might do. Such as:

- Accompanying or escorting to an appointment
- Joining for a walk
- Helping with access to online services
- Making a friendly phone call
- Taking to a community event
- Picking up essential shopping or medication

How has the project been affected by COVID?

The project was due to start in February 2020, however, because of the extreme uncertainty and pressure on GPs, we decided to delay the start of the project. We now feel we can tentatively start the project even though there may be some restrictions on what volunteers can do.

There has been an enormous growth in people coming forward as volunteers through initiatives like the NHS's Good Sam App and the Mutual Aid Groups that have sprung up across H&F. Some willing volunteers were unable to help during the lockdown, so we hope to be able to offer them rewarding roles working with GP surgeries.



Why is it only happening at Bush Doctors?

This is a pilot project, and we hope, if it works at Bush Doctors, it can be scaled up across other GP practices and other Primary Care Networks (PCNs) in H&F. We are running a similar pilot at two GP practices in the Golborne Road in North Kensington.

How are you recruiting volunteers?

Initially we are looking to recruit a small group of volunteers (Helpforce Companions). These will be recruited from UPG's volunteer pool, as well as referrals from some key local organisations we have been working with such as H&F Volunteer Centre. If you know people that live in the area who you think would be interested, please do ask them to contact Barbara Shelton at UPG barbara@upg.org.uk. Prospective volunteers can also complete an [online registration form](#) which Barbara will follow-up.

How are you evaluating the project?

Evaluation is a crucial part of the project, and this project is part of a NW London approach to volunteering where a series of different volunteer initiatives are being tested. Essentially, we will be looking to assess the impact of the service on:

- The local people that volunteers are supporting
- GP based staff
- The volunteers / Helpforce Companions themselves

Who do I contact for further information?

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