

Experiences of NHS Scotland Volunteers

NHS Dumfries & Galloway

NHS Fife

NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde

NHS Lothian

NHS Tayside

November 2023

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Executive Summary

In early 2023, volunteer managers from NHS Fife, NHS Lothian, NHS Tayside, NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde and NHS Dumfries and Galloway worked together on a pilot of a national volunteer experience survey, supported by the NHS Scotland Volunteering Programme Team.

The purpose of the survey was to take a consistent approach to gathering data on volunteer's experiences of volunteering within their NHS board, and to then use the data gathered to create a local improvement plan.

By taking this approach it also allowed for the entire data set to be analysed at a national level against the [Volunteering for All: National Outcomes Framework](#) principles and over time will help us to evidence the impact of volunteering, to identify improvements and to celebrate good practice.

The questions in Section 1 of the survey were developed using the six principles contained within Volunteering for All: National Outcomes Framework. A total of 1557 volunteers were invited to participate in the survey. 30% of volunteers (n=460) chose to participate in the survey and 100% of participants provided responses to all 19 statements in section 1.

Principle 1: Flexible and responsive

Recent [published research](#) in volunteering suggests that the way in which people want to volunteer is changing and there is a need for volunteer roles to be flexible, to be easy to access and to be able to fit in around people's busy lives.

91% of volunteers who responded to the survey feel able to adjust their level of commitment or change their role, 95% feel able to give their time on their own terms and 96% know how to change / pause or stop volunteering. This demonstrates a good level of flexibility in volunteering within the NHS boards who participated in the survey.

Principle 2: Enabled and supported

99% of volunteers who responded to the survey enjoy taking part in volunteering and 97% knew who to ask for help if needed and understand how to carry out their role. This indicates that volunteers within the NHS boards who participated are very satisfied with their volunteering experience and feel well supported to carry out their roles. While still positive a lower proportion of volunteers reported being satisfied with practical help in terms of access, training and expenses (86%) which would benefit from further exploration to identify and implement improvements.

Principle 3: Sociable and connected

97% volunteers who responded to the survey enjoy the experience of volunteering and feel part of something, indicating a feeling of connection to the organisation. A slightly lower proportion 88% of volunteers feel that they have opportunities to meet up and spend time with others and 89% feel that that they are volunteering with or for common goals. This would merit further consideration in conjunction with the comments by some volunteers in section 2, which suggests that volunteers would value the opportunity to learn from each other, socialise and develop connections.

Principle 4: Valued and appreciated

When volunteers feel valued and appreciated they are more likely to stay with an organisation for longer. 95% of volunteers feel valued for what they bring and that their contributions are appreciated, while a slightly lower proportion of 90% said they can see how they make a difference. NHS boards are therefore encouraged to consider how they can provide feedback to volunteers which demonstrates the difference that they make.

Principle 5: Recognises diversity

This principle seeks to ensure that volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds, with a wide range of skills and experiences are supported to become involved in volunteering. 93% of volunteers who responded to the survey always feel involved and that their knowledge, skills and experiences are respected and utilised, while 91% of volunteers do not feel excluded because of who they are. However, through this survey we do not have any information on the demographics of the volunteers who responded and it is essential in future to gather and analyse equalities monitoring data as part of the volunteer experience survey.

Principle 6: Meaningful and purposeful

When volunteering is meaningful and purposeful for the volunteer it contributes to feelings of satisfaction and supports volunteer retention. 93% of volunteers who responded to the survey feel that what they do is worthwhile, 92% felt that their volunteering makes a difference and 91% that they are contributing to something that is important to them (91%).

Questions in section 2 of the survey were open ended to give volunteers the opportunity to provide feedback in their own words. The feedback provided was themed into categories.

What has been your favourite moment from volunteering within the last year?

87% (n=399) of volunteers who participated in the survey responded to this question, the responses were themed into 6 categories.

Providing support to patients and staff

Volunteers reported that their favourite moments from volunteering were when they were able to provide help and support directly to patients and staff (n=299).

Feeling part of the team / receiving feedback or thanks

Volunteers also frequently responded with comments relating to feeling valued through being treated as part of the team and receiving positive feedback or thanks (n=79).

Unable to pick a favourite – it's all enjoyable

Some volunteers found it impossible to pick one favourite moment (n=27).

Meeting new people

Several volunteers noted their favourite moment in terms of meeting new people – be those staff or other volunteers (n=22).

Building / using skills

Similarly, some volunteers linked their favourite moment to either being able to use their existing skills or to develop new skills which will help them in their future careers (n=15).

If you could improve one thing about your volunteering experience with your NHS board, what would it be?

76% (n=351) of volunteers who participated in the survey responded to this question. The responses were sorted into 11 categories.

No improvement suggestions / happy with current volunteering

Just under one third of responses from volunteers suggested that they were happy with their volunteering experience and had no improvements to suggest (n=111).

Volunteering tasks

Some volunteers suggested that they could do more whilst volunteering, and that there could be more clarity on the types of tasks which are / are not for volunteers to carry out (n=33).

Training

A similar proportion of volunteers made suggestions around improvements for volunteer training, including the types of training and when and where training takes place (n=34).

Environment / resources

For some volunteers the environment that they volunteer within impacts on their experience of volunteering. Others made suggestions on improvements to their volunteering experience through changes in process or through provision of extra resources to help them carry out their role (n=36).

Feedback

A small number of volunteers shared that it would be helpful to have a mechanism to receive feedback and recognition for their contributions (n=8).

Practical suggestions

Several practical suggestions were made by volunteers which would improve their volunteering experience, these ranged from being able to find a replacement volunteer if unable to attend, having more information about the patients they are supporting, through to improvements in the content of appointment letters and a lack of wheelchairs (n=28).

Communication

Improvements in communication were suggested by some volunteers including updates on changes which affect how they carry out their role, and other volunteering opportunities available within the NHS board (n=20).

Connection to other volunteers

Volunteers would value more opportunities to be able to connect with other volunteers, to get peer support, to learn and share and to develop new friendships (n=29).

Recruitment

A small number of volunteers suggested that the recruitment and onboarding process takes too long and is too bureaucratic. Others suggested that further recruitment of new volunteers would be helpful, as would providing more flexibility in volunteering (n=15).

Staff understanding of volunteer roles

Some volunteers commented that staff they volunteer alongside either expect too much from volunteers and that they don't have a clear understanding of the boundaries of the volunteer role. Conversely, others felt that they are not utilised to maximum benefit by staff (n=6).

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of volunteering with us?

19% (n=87) volunteers commented on how positive their experience has been, comments ranged from the level of support provided to a disabled volunteer, feeling supported and valued by staff, the positive impact that volunteering has had on mental health, making new friends and learning new skills.

If someone was thinking about volunteering with your NHS board how would you encourage them to get involved?

28% (n=131) volunteers responded to this question, taking the opportunity to share how they would encourage others to get involved in volunteering with their NHS board.

“The rewards of giving back to your community develop confidence, communication opportunities to take on further training and qualifications. A sense of pride and caring for others takes away from your own worries. Even for just a few hours a week. Sharing and chatting over a Cuppa or while taking part in an activity helps you feel better and have a reason to get up and get outside... the effect is priceless and a lot better than medication”.

Methodology

The survey was developed by a small group of staff who lead volunteering within their NHS board area, supported by the NHS Scotland Volunteering Programme. All NHS boards were then invited to participate in the pilot, five NHS boards accepted the invitation. Local NHS boards sent the survey to all of their volunteers between March – October 2023, responses were anonymous and received by local volunteering teams.

The survey was separated into two sections. Section one comprised of 19 statements, volunteers were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with each using the following scale:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Section two asked open questions encouraging volunteers to share their experiences and to suggest areas for improvement. The responses in this section have been themed into a number of categories.

A set of recommendations has been derived from the responses in both sections of the survey.

Results: Section 1

Questions in section 1 of the survey were developed using the six principles contained within Volunteering for All: National Outcomes Framework.

A total of 1557 volunteers were invited to participate in the survey. 30% of volunteers (n=460) chose to participate in the survey and 100% of participants provided responses to all 19 statements in section 1.

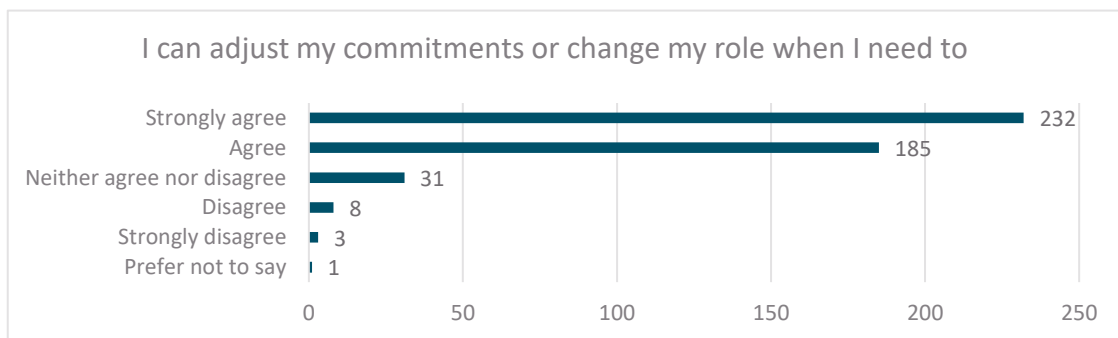
Principle 1: Flexible and responsive

Recent [published research](#) in volunteering suggests that the way in which people want to volunteer is changing and there is a need for volunteer roles to be flexible, to be easy to access and to be able to fit in around people's busy lives.

91% of volunteers who responded to the survey feel able to adjust their level of commitment or change their role, 95% feel able to give their time on their own terms and 96% know how to change / pause or stop volunteering. This demonstrates a good level of flexibility in volunteering within the NHS boards who participated in the survey.

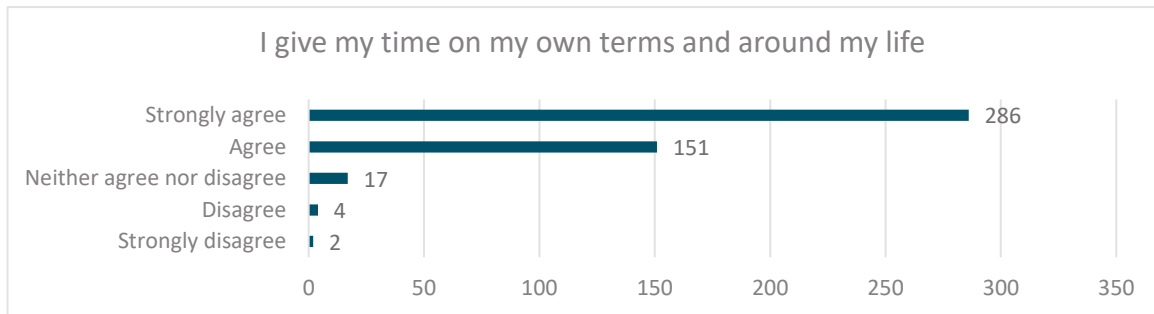
I can adjust my commitment or change my role when I need to

- 91% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed
- 6% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree
- 2% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree
- 1% of volunteers prefer not to say



I give my time on my own terms and around my life

- 95% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed
- 4% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree
- 1% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree
- 0% of volunteers prefer not to say



I know what I'm being asked to do and how to pause/change/stop volunteering if I wish

- 96% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed
- 2% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree
- 1% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree
- 1% of volunteers prefer not to say



Principle 2: Enabled and supported

99% of volunteers who responded to the survey enjoy taking part in volunteering and 97% know who to ask for help if needed and understand how to carry out their role. This indicates that volunteers within the NHS boards who participated are very satisfied with their volunteering experience and feel well supported to carry out their roles. A lower proportion of volunteers reported being satisfied with practical help in terms of access, training and expenses (86%). Whilst this is still a positive figure, it would benefit from further exploration to identify and implement improvements.

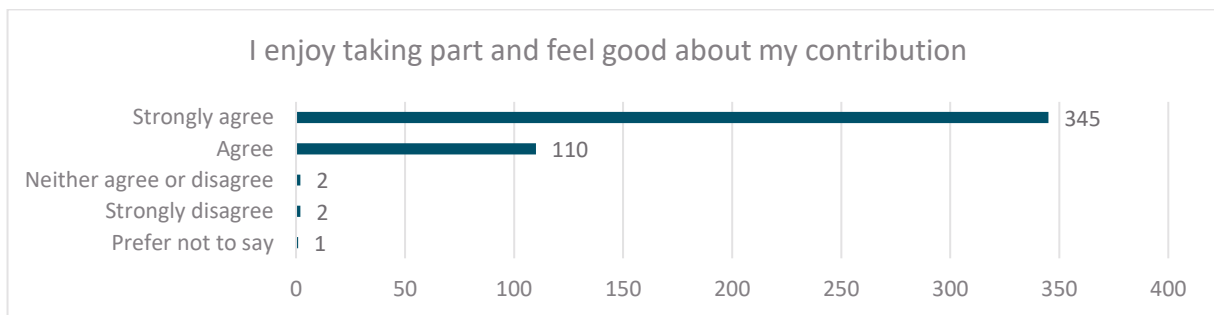
I enjoy taking part and feel good about my contribution

99% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

0.4% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

0.4% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

0.2% of volunteers prefer not to say



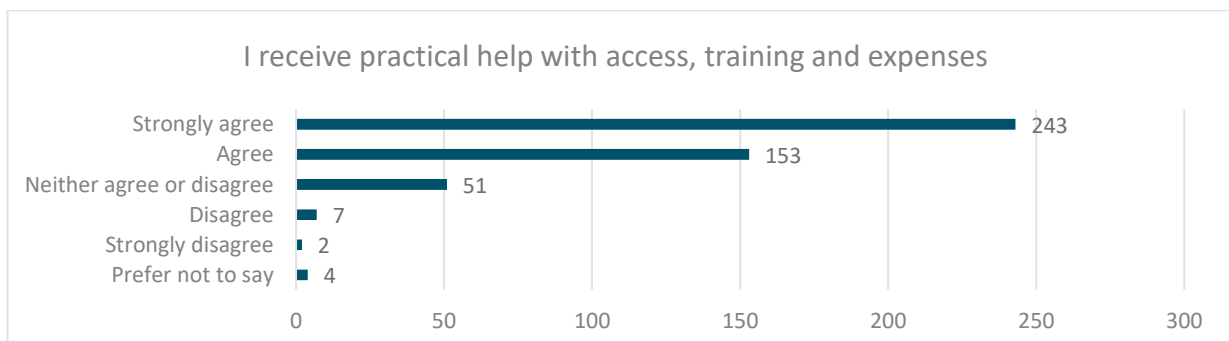
I receive practical help with access, training and expenses

86% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

11% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

2% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

1% of volunteers prefer not to say



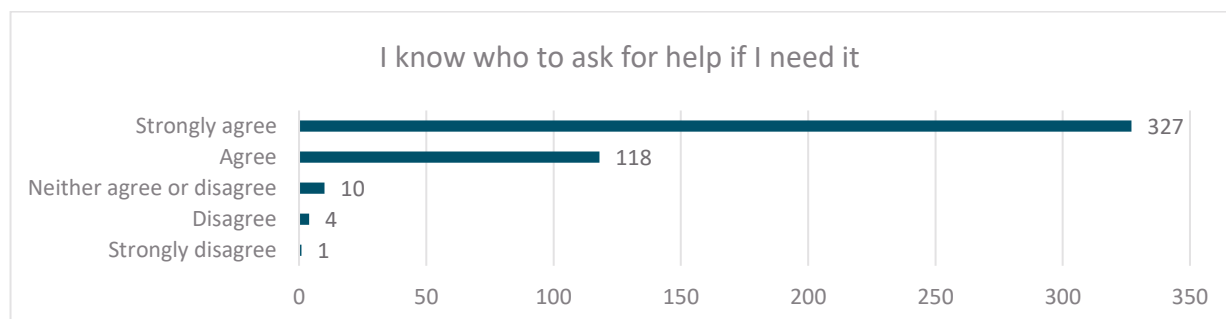
I know who to ask for help if I need it

97% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

2% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

1% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

0% of volunteers prefer not to say



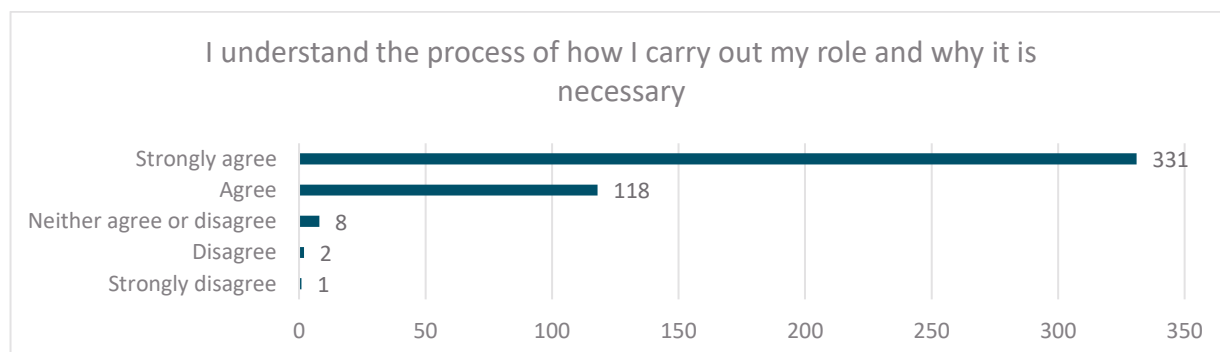
I understand the process of how I carry out my role and why it's necessary

97% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

2% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

1% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

0% of volunteers prefer not to say

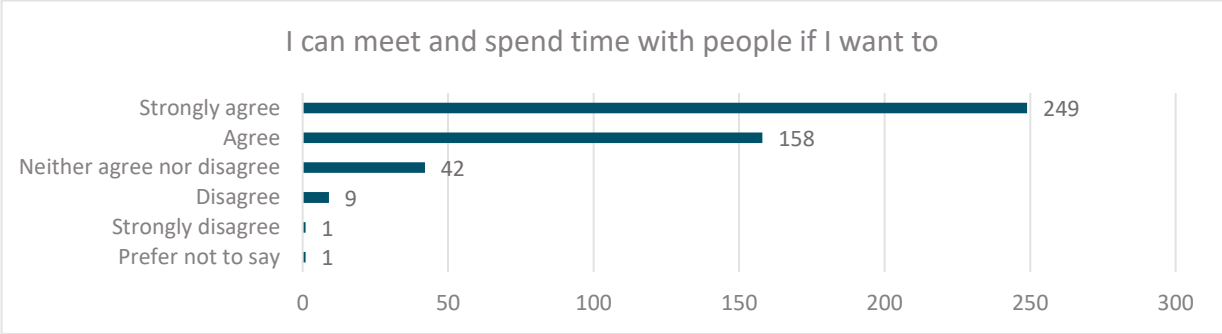


Principle 3: Sociable and connected

97% volunteers who responded to the survey enjoy the experience of volunteering and feel part of something, indicating a feeling of connection to the organisation. A slightly lower proportion 88% of volunteers feel that they have opportunities to meet up and spend time with others and 89% feel that that they are volunteering with or for common goals. This would merit further consideration in conjunction with the comments by some volunteers in section 2, which suggests that volunteers would value the opportunity to learn from each other, socialise and develop connections.

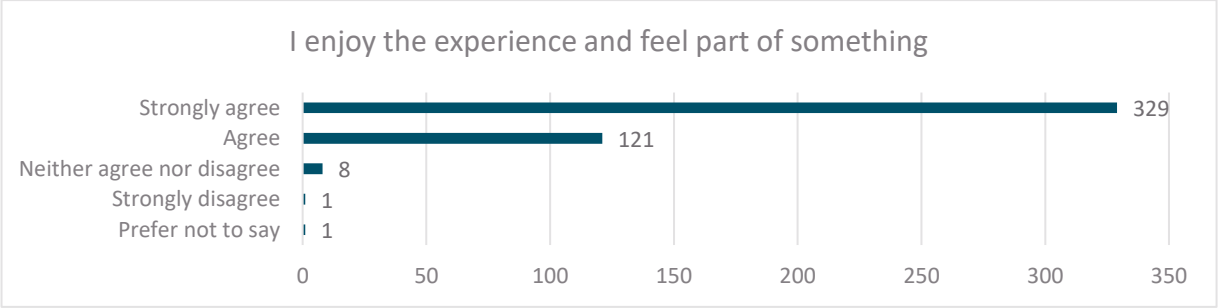
I can meet and spend time with people if I want to

88% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed
9% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree
2% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree
1% of volunteers prefer not to say



I enjoy the experience and feel part of something

97% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed
2% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree
0.5% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree
0.5% of volunteers prefer not to say



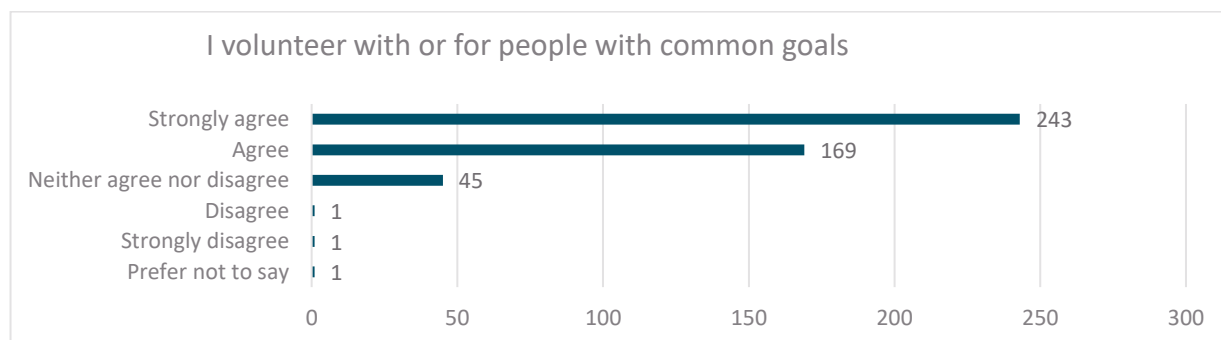
I volunteer with or for people with common goals

89% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

10% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

0.7% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

0.3% of volunteers prefer not to say



Principle 4: Valued and appreciated

When volunteers feel valued and appreciated they are more likely to stay with an organisation for longer. 95% of volunteers feel valued for what they bring and that their contributions are appreciated, and 90% said they can see how they make a difference. NHS boards are therefore encouraged to consider how they can provide feedback to volunteers which demonstrates the difference that they make.

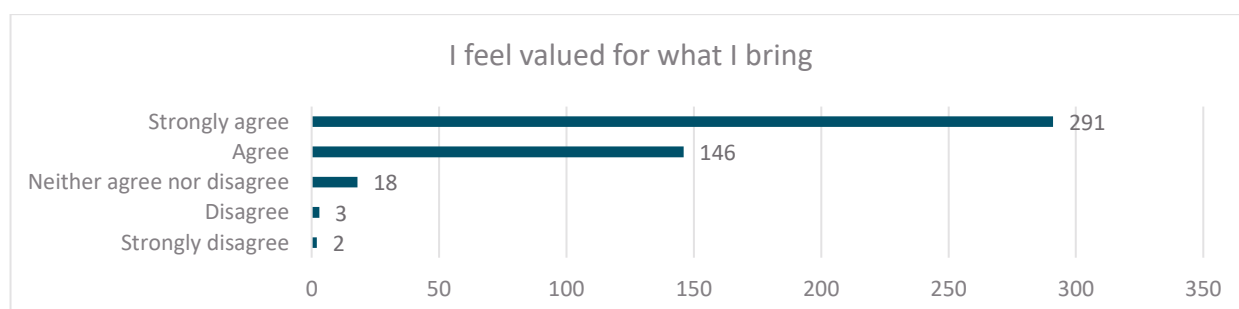
I feel valued for what I bring

95% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

4% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

1% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

0% of volunteers prefer not to say



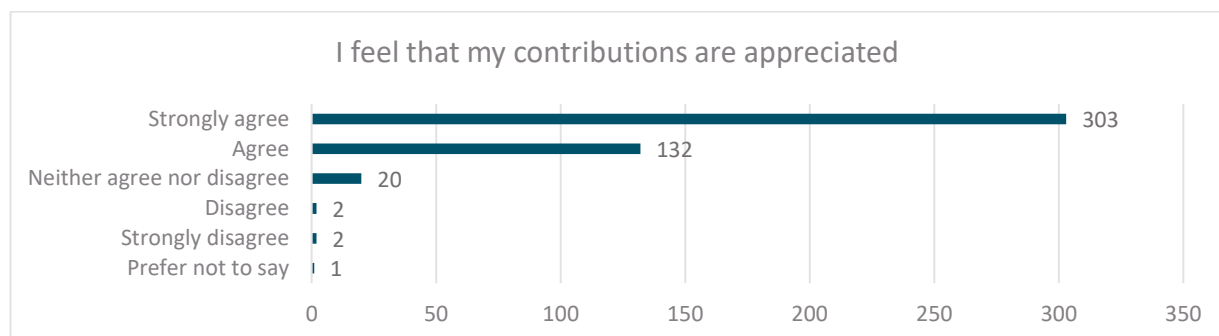
I feel that my contributions are appreciated

95% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

4% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

0.8% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

0.2% of volunteers prefer not to say



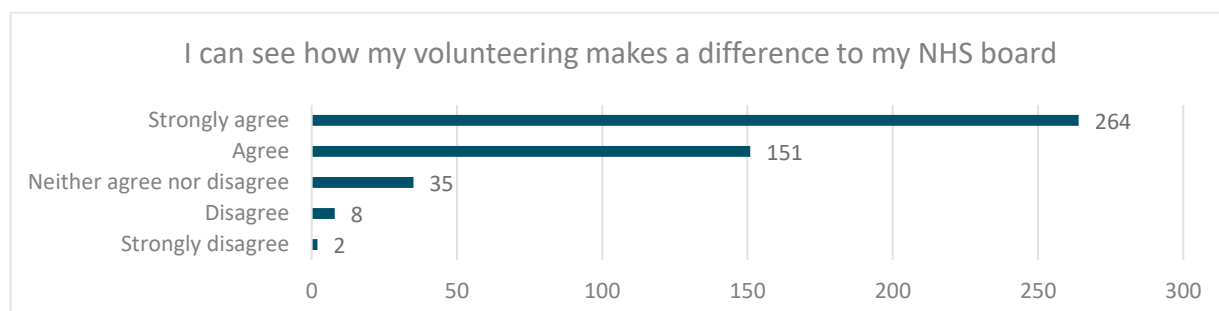
I can see how my volunteering makes a difference to my NHS board

90% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

8% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

2% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

0% of volunteers prefer not to say



Principle 5: Recognises diversity

This principle seeks to ensure that volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds, with a wide range of skills and experiences are supported to become involved in volunteering. 93% of volunteers who responded to the survey always feel involved and that their knowledge, skills and experiences are respected and utilised, while 91% of volunteers do not feel excluded because of who they are. However, through this survey we do not have any information on the demographics of the volunteers who responded and it may be more beneficial in future to gather and analyse equalities monitoring data as part of the volunteer experience survey.

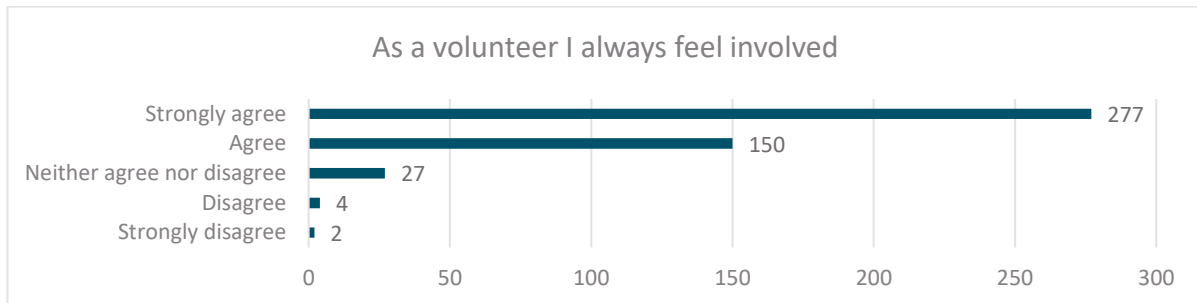
As a volunteer I always feel involved

93% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

6% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

1% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

0% of volunteers prefer not to say



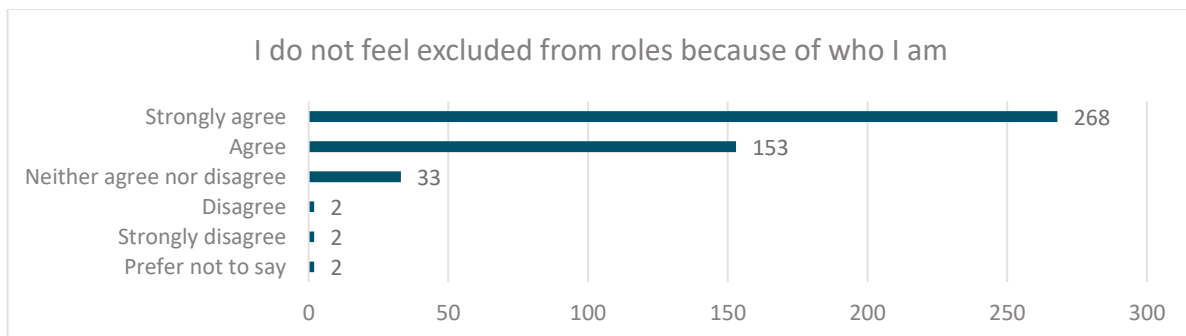
I do not feel excluded from roles because of who I am

91% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

7% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

0.6% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

0.4% of volunteers prefer not to say



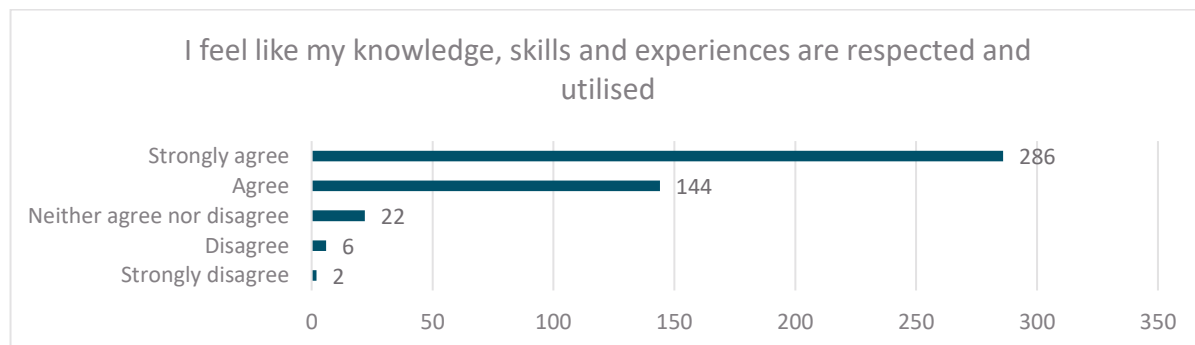
I feel like my knowledge, skills and experiences are respected and utilised

93% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

5% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

2% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

0% of volunteers prefer not to say



Principle 6: Meaningful and purposeful

Meaningful and purposeful volunteering contributes to feelings of satisfaction for the volunteer and supports volunteer retention. 93% of volunteers who responded to the survey feel that what they do is worthwhile, 92% felt that their volunteering makes a difference and 91% that they are contributing to something that is important to them (91%).

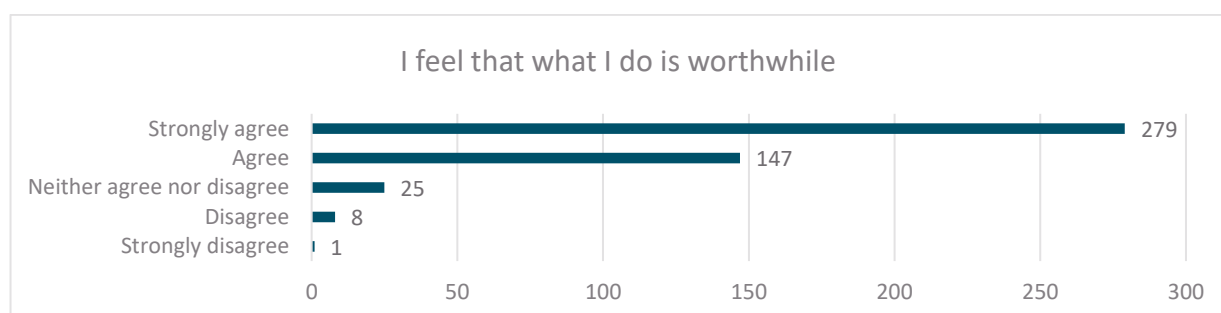
I feel that what I do is worthwhile

93% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

5% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

2% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

0% of volunteers prefer not to say



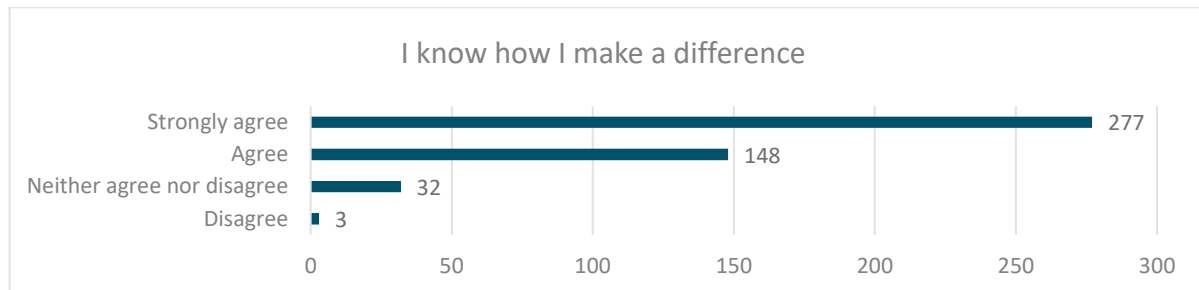
I know how I make a difference

92% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

7% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

1% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

0% of volunteers prefer not to say



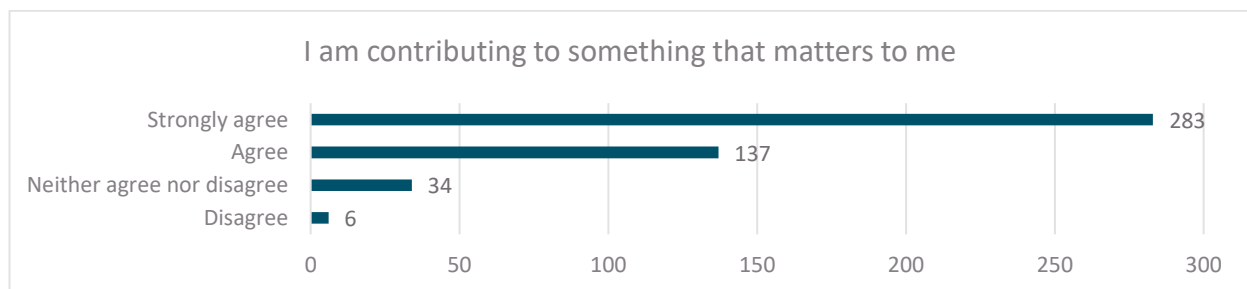
I am contributing to something that matters to me

91% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

8% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

1% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

0% of volunteers prefer not to say



Results: Section 2

Questions in section 2 of the survey were open ended to give volunteers the opportunity to provide feedback in their own words. The feedback provided was themed into categories.

What has been your favourite moment from volunteering within the last year?

87% (n=399) of volunteers who participated in the survey responded to this question, the responses were themed into 6 categories. A selection of comments from each category are included to illustrate the range of comments received.

Providing support to patients and staff

Volunteers reported that their favourite moments from volunteering were when they were able to provide help and support directly to patients and staff (n=299).

“Too many, the one that reminds me that we are there to assist - elderly lady came in and stood at the main entrance, I approached her and asked if I could help. I took her to her appointment waiting area. She turned and looked at me saying if you had not approached me I would have walked back out!”

“Watching a mix of staff from all areas of the hospital relax in the hub or walk around the pond to see the swans and other wild life.”

“I listened to an 80 year old man whose wife has dementia and as he visited her in care he grieved that there were so many deep losses that he was trying to 'accept.' He had been supported by other in the NHS with varying degrees of success. He told me that what was so special about the listening service was that there was no agenda he was being processed through. He was the agenda!”

“Seeing the improvement and the increase in confidence clients make in the Better Balance class.”

“Sitting with people. Talking and on occasion, holding their hand.”

“As a driver picking up my patient in mid-winter and driving along frosty roads to get to the Day Care Centre where the patient had a rewarding time.”

“I approached an elderly lady to ask if she needed any help finding a particular place in the hospital and ended up having a 10 minute chat with her which she thanked me for afterwards. It transpired she was going through a very emotional time regarding her family and she was so appreciative of our chat. It made me feel so useful and valued.”

Feeling part of the team / receiving feedback or thanks

Volunteers also frequently responded with comments relating to feeling valued through being seen as part of the team and receiving positive feedback or thanks (n=79).

“Being told by a patient that she appreciates what us volunteers do.”

“Helping a patient talk through his grief and two days later having them tell me that it really helped. So much so that they had been dreading an anniversary of their partner's death (that day) and could now be grateful for their life together instead of angry about their loss.”

“When the nurses came up to me to show me my picture on the wall, they were so happy for me, It really made me feel like I was part of the staff and I really felt appreciated.”

“Senior member of staff approaching me to thank me for giving my time to volunteer, and acknowledging the value of volunteers across the hospital.”

“I welcomed a lady to the hospital who was clearly nervous about her appointment. When she came out of her appointment she came up to me and thanked me for making it easier for her.”

“A doctor saying good morning using my name. This made me feel part of the team, even though I am only a volunteer.”

Unable to pick a favourite – it's all enjoyable

Some volunteers found it impossible to pick one favourite moment (n=27).

“Enjoy every day working as a volunteer. I love meeting new people, fellow volunteers, patients and NHS staff. Particularly pleasing to feel I am helping to make patient journey less stressful, as many are very anxious about their appointment.”

“Too many good experiences to pick one out.”

“No particular moment but always glad to have helped anyone to needs it.”

Meeting new people

Several volunteers noted their favourite moment in terms of meeting new people – be those staff or other volunteers (n=22).

“Meeting fellow volunteers for a riverside walk and lunch to celebrate volunteers week.”

“Meeting other staff on the ward from all disciplines.”

Building / using skills

Similarly, some volunteers linked their favourite moment to either being able to use their existing skills or to develop new skills which will help them in their future careers (n=15).

“The growing confidence the staff have in my abilities and transferable skills.”

“Starting a class of my own teaching tai chi/chair yoga at [venue]. I never imagined at the start that I would have a full class within weeks of starting and that the members would continue to come and the class is so successful. It's great to see people benefit from my efforts.”

“Being on the wards and getting hands on experience of what it is like to be on the wards as I am working towards to hopefully work on the wards one day.”

Other comments

A small number of volunteers felt that they were too new to their volunteering role to be able to comment (n=4), and some mentioned that their favourite moment was being able to return to volunteering after the pandemic (n=3).

“I have just started volunteering.”

“Getting back after the long absence due to covid.”

If you could improve one thing about your volunteering experience with your NHS Board, what would it be?

76% (n=351) of volunteers who participated in the survey responded to this question. The responses were themed into 11 categories. A selection of comments from each category are included to illustrate the range of improvement suggested within each category.

No improvement suggestions / happy with current volunteering

Just under one third of responses from volunteers related to them being happy with their volunteering experience and having no improvements to suggest (n=111).

“In my current role, I'm happy with all of my experience.”

“I absolutely had a great experience with NHS, I don't have any suggestions.”

“My volunteering experience has been very positive and as such I have no suggestions for improvement.”

“It does not need improving. I am very satisfied.”

Volunteering tasks

Some volunteers suggested that they could do more whilst volunteering, and that there could be more clarity on the types of tasks which are / are not for volunteers to carry out (n=33).

“Sometimes there is not much to do if patients asleep/occupied.”

“Sometimes feel that we are overly restricted in what we can/cannot do.”

“Be more specific with what we are and aren’t allowed to do e.g. emptying bins, changing bed positions.”

“Have a more active role helping patients recover.”

“Being more free to just chat with patients rather than doing 'meaningful activities' only. I think just talking to a patient can be the most meaningful activity for them.”

“Maybe just a bit more to do.”

Training

A similar proportion of volunteers made suggestions around improvements for volunteer training, including the types of training and when and where training takes place (n=34).

“Improve the range of training for volunteers on a national basis.”

“In-person training, but I understand the impact COVID has had on this.”

“Try and learn more about dementia and Alzheimer’s.”

“More training for people with no experience at the ward. That is, they must not feel shy of their volunteering work.”

“I cannot access many of the training opportunities due to other commitments so recorded training opportunities might be a good opportunity.”

“To have training or meetings in the evenings.”

Environment / resources

For some volunteers the environment that they volunteer within impacts on their experience of volunteering. Others made suggestions on improvements to their volunteering experience through changes in process or through provision of extra resources to help them carry out their role (n=36).

“Car parking is a huge issue, not just for volunteers but for visitors too.”

“More options of activities to do with patients. Not all are able to have conversations (verbal issues after stroke etc.) but they might be able to communicate with a whiteboard, play a board game or have a book read to them, so more equipment being available to facilitate these activities would be good.”

“A warmer working environment! (I work as a Welcome Guide close to doors constantly opening and closing - it gets very chill in really cold weather.)”

“Have a standard uniform Polo Shirt.”

Feedback

A small number of volunteers shared that it would be helpful to have a mechanism to receive feedback and recognition for their contributions (n=8).

“It would be useful to receive feedback so that I know I am providing a useful, helpful service.”

“Maybe some way to record attendance. I think having a record of when a volunteer started and finished would be great, so that my time commitment could be recognised. I’ve been present when staff have discussed other volunteers completely not showing up for shifts, and the reactions of some staff are very pleasant when they see me every week, like if it was surprising that I show up.”

“Perhaps some feedback about how well I’m doing the ‘job’, how I could improve etc. Performance review!”

Practical suggestions

A number of very practical suggestions were made by volunteers which would improve their volunteering experience, these ranged from being able to find a replacement volunteer if unable to attend, having more information about the patients they are supporting, through to improvements in the content of appointment letters and a lack of wheelchairs (n=28).

“Maybe a list of volunteers able to fill in for you if you can’t manage a shift.”

“Having support to allow for proper breaks.”

“Knowing more about the people I’m being asked to transport e.g. dementia physical ability etc.”

“Improve the payment for Mileage for people using own transport. Its 24p per mile at present.”

“I would love patients to be given clear information regarding their appointments.”

“More Wheelchairs available for us to help patients as there is never enough.”

Communication

Improvements in communication were suggested by some volunteers across a number of topics such as changes which affect how they carry out their role, and other volunteering opportunities available within the NHS board (n=20).

“Perhaps being informed of changes that may affect my duties.”

“Getting updates on any other volunteering roles available, particularly some short term help required.”

NHS responding to our observations and implementing some simple cost free improvements that would help patients.”

“Communication with staff on our ward is good but I know it’s not on all wards and there’s no framework for this such as meeting etc.”

“Better communication about rules and regulations e.g.: people unsure about whether we are to still change in toilets before we start, some say yes others say no so everyone is unsure.”

Connection to other volunteers

Volunteers would value more opportunities to be able to connect with other volunteers, to get peer support, to learn and share and to develop new friendships (n=29).

"More opportunities to connect with others in similar volunteer roles."

"Finding out more about other volunteers - how they got into volunteering, what motivates them and finding out what they have learned along the way. I think everyone who volunteers will have an interesting story to tell about their experience!"

"Have more shadowing opportunities so you can spend time and talk to other volunteers whilst also training them."

"I would like to volunteer with another person, in pairs."

"Online forum for volunteers where we can share ideas, best practice or talk through concerns that we not want to discuss with management."

"Have more volunteers events throughout the year so that we can meet other volunteers as when we are volunteering there is normally only one of us on a ward."

"It would be nice to have volunteer network in the future where all the volunteers can be connected, as you only see and interact with people you are working with."

Recruitment

A small number of volunteers suggested that the recruitment and onboarding process takes too long and is too bureaucratic. Others suggested that further recruitment of new volunteers would be helpful, as would providing more flexibility in volunteering (n=15).

"It took longer from initial contact to actually starting a placement than I expected. All of the steps (application, interviews, training, disclosure) are of course necessary, but managing expectations and, if possible, streamlining the process are perhaps areas to look at."

"Less bureaucracy."

"A few more volunteers would be good to allow slightly shorter shifts."

"It would be good if you could be more flexible with the days you volunteer and maybe do more days if you wished."

Staff understanding of volunteer roles

Some volunteers commented that staff they volunteer alongside either expect too much from volunteers and that they don't have a clear understanding of the boundaries of the volunteer role. Conversely, others felt that they are not utilised to maximum benefit by staff (n=6).

"Some staff expect too much of the volunteers - our role is limited and they don't always appreciate this."

"Communication with teams on shift when we will be volunteering. Sometimes staff don't know when we are coming in and some staff don't realise we are there to support them rather than take their jobs. Sometimes feel I am not utilised effectively depending on who is on shift."

"Not sure but perhaps a better understanding by staff of some of the volunteer roles. In previous roles I sometimes felt the staff found me more of a hindrance than a help especially on busy wards."

Other comments

A range of other comments were also received around individuals wishing they had more free time to be able to volunteer, that volunteering opportunities were closer to where they lived, or that they felt that they could not suggest improvements as they were new to volunteering (n=31).

"To have more volunteering roles closer to where I live."

"I wish that I had started doing this earlier."

"I had done it sooner and probably gone into a new/different working employment."

"Fairly new to volunteering so too soon to say."

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of volunteering with us?

19% (n=87) volunteers commented on how positive their experience has been, comments ranged from the level of support provided to a disabled volunteer, feeling supported and valued by staff, the positive impact that volunteering has had on mental health, making new friends and learning new skills.

“Being a volunteer has really helped me and I have made so many good friends in the team.”

“I love volunteering. I volunteer on the ward and also in the Cancer Information and Support Centre. Talking to people is such a social activity but also keeps the brain alive since one never knows what the conversation is going to relate to. I learn something new each week.”

“The staff, no matter how much stress they are under, are always friendly and helpful. It’s a privilege to help out.”

“I have been volunteering now for over a year and love every minute of it. It has done so much for my confidence. Wish I had joined up years ago.”

“The staff I work with have been fabulous. They treat me as a colleague and include me in events. My mental health has improved as I am no longer so lonely.”

“Just to state that I am overwhelmed by the kindness of various staff around me which makes my volunteering duties more easy and pleasant.”

0.7% (n=3) of volunteers who responded to this question commented on their poor experience. One volunteer reported that they feel that staff do not interact with volunteers positively or involve them decisions which affect them resulting in a ‘them and us’ culture. Two others felt that they are not valued for their contribution by their manager.

If someone was thinking about volunteering with your NHS board how would you encourage them to get involved?

28% (n=131) volunteers responded to this question, taking the opportunity to share how they would encourage others to get involved in volunteering with their NHS board, a small selection of comments are noted below:

“What's been especially good for me is to take on a role that really fits with what I'm best equipped to offer. I find that very satisfying and enriching.

So I'd strongly recommend anyone thinking that they might like to volunteer in a health setting to contact a local volunteer coordinator, and to meet them to explore possibilities that might fit with their particular interests, abilities and potential for development.

From my experience, they'll find the co-ordinators and other staff concerned to be welcoming and encouraging. And they'll perhaps discover potential possibilities that they may not have imagined. They'll hopefully find real satisfaction in being able to help people at a time and in a situation when they may well be feeling quite anxious and vulnerable.”

“If you have a bit of spare time and like to meet and assist people, being a Welcome Guide at a hospital is a very feel good thing to do.”

“I would encourage them by letting them know how rewarding it is by making a person's day better.”

“I would tell them it's the best opportunity to support people who needs love and care and it would be so satisfying at the moment you see a patient feeling better.”

“I would tell them how much I enjoy being a volunteer always something extra to be put on cv if a person thinking of working in the healthcare sector get experience.”

“I would tell them how much it had helped me and how well you are supported by the staff you will work with and the volunteer service.”

“Gives you a new focus particularly if you live alone. Getting involved with a team of new people who become friends. Excellent ongoing training given which boosts your confidence in a new role.”

Recommendations

Five recommendations for NHS boards in areas where improvements could be made to volunteer experience:

1. Practical help for volunteers in terms of access, training and expenses.
2. More opportunities for volunteers to learn from each other, socialise and develop connections.
3. How NHS Scotland staff actively help volunteers to feel like part of the team.
4. Feedback for volunteers which demonstrates the difference that they make.
5. Consideration of the tasks contained within the volunteer role, clarity (for staff and volunteers) on the types of tasks which volunteers are permitted to carry out and those which they are not.

Three recommendations have been identified which would improve the survey in its next iteration:

1. Roll out the survey in 2024-25 and encourage all NHS boards who involve volunteers in their work to participate.
2. Ask volunteers in future surveys to identify the volunteer role that they carry out to provide deeper insight into any difference of experience of volunteers depending on role type.
3. Gather equalities monitoring data anonymously as part of the survey to provide better insight into the 'Recognising Diversity' principle.

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You can read and download this document from our website.

We are happy to consider requests for other languages or formats.

Please contact our Equality and Diversity Advisor on 0141 225 6999

or email his.contactpublicinvolvement@nhs.scot

Healthcare Improvement Scotland

Edinburgh Office
Gyle Square
1 South Gyle Crescent
Edinburgh
EH12 9EB

Glasgow Office
Delta House
50 West Nile Street
Glasgow
G1 2NP

0131 623 4300

0141 225 6999

www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org