

Below Jules speaks about the role of volunteers in NHS organisations in Norfolk. To provide context here are some links to seminal reports and guidance about volunteering in health and social care published by IVR:

- [In good health: assessing the impact of volunteering in the NHS,](#)
- [Health check: a practical guide to assessing the impact of volunteering in the NHS,](#)
- [Volunteering and health: good practice case studies,](#)
- [Volunteering and health: evidence of impact and implications for policy and practice](#) and
- [Volunteering for health promotion.](#)

IVR was also a trailblazer considering the role of volunteers in democratic participation in the NHS through [Patient and Public Involvement.](#)

APPRECIATING OUR VOLUNTEERS IN NORFOLK AND WAVENEY

Jules Alderson, STP Volunteering Project Manager,
Workforce Transformation, Norfolk and Waveney Health and Care Partnership

Who could have imagined that Volunteers' Week 2020 would be taking place in these unprecedented circumstances?

Volunteer's Week celebrations and festivities are usually the highlight of the volunteering calendar, and the opportunity to celebrate with our volunteers will be sorely missed. Whilst we can't join together this week to recognise the difference that local people make, their enormous contribution is far from forgotten. And what's more, we can celebrate the silver lining to these troubled times; the amazing way our communities and organisations have come together, and be excited for the opportunities this brings.

At present, the majority of volunteers in our NHS organisations have been stood down from their usual duties. This decision has been taken to protect our volunteers and patients, and to limit the spread of infection. Paul Holley-Smith, Voluntary Services Manager, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, King's Lynn says:

"Although we have had to put a halt to volunteering at the moment; it is worth recognising the 38,000 hours contributed by our volunteers in 2019. I am very proud of the care and compassion they all demonstrate on a daily basis."

Our organisations know how keen our volunteers are to safely get back to making a difference, and teams are busy working to find new ways to make this to happen. As the population has embraced technology like never before, we are working on solutions that will enable people to volunteer from the comfort of their own home or take into account social distancing guidelines when volunteering in hospitals and other settings restarts in the near future.

Meanwhile, news coverage has been full of the fantastic community response, through organised campaigns such as by Norfolk County Council and Voluntary Norfolk which has seen over 3,500 volunteers sign up, as well as the thousands of mutual aid groups which have formed spontaneously.

This fantastic community response has really shone a spotlight on the importance of volunteering and how great it feels to be helping out in your local community. Barbara Reed, says

"It has been a wonderful and wholehearted experience to witness our street community pull together during these challenging times. Who would've thought that something as simple as a WhatsApp group could serve so many powerful purposes; and most of all to build relationships that will outlast the pandemic."

And the good news isn't limited to individual involvement; organisations across the area have been working much more closely together during this period, with the barriers of bureaucracy being hurdled much quicker than ever imagined pre-COVID. Rik Martin, Development Manager, Community Action Norfolk, says:

"The voluntary sector has been brilliant at responding to the COVID 19 crisis. Thousands of extra volunteers have come forward, communities are working together to help each other, and County and local authorities are working closer than ever with VCSE to manage activity and support volunteers".

So, whilst this Volunteers' Week will be quieter than usual, the volunteers of Norfolk and Waveney are still being celebrated. Anna Morgan MBE, Director of Workforce, Norfolk and Waveney Health & Care Partnership says

"Volunteers are highly valued members of our workforce. The activities that they carry out make a huge difference to the experience our patients have of their time with us, and our staff really benefit from the support that volunteers give. We are continuing to look at ways to bring our volunteers back safely, but in the meantime we just want to say 'thank you' and we are looking forward to the day when you will be back with us again."