

TOGETHER WE CAN

A GUIDE TO FAMILY SUPPORT VOLUNTEERING

TOP TIPS FOR FAMILY SUPPORT VOLUNTEER SERVICES WITHIN THE NHS

Together We Can is a collection of resources for organisations developing a service where volunteers support families of a child with a life-limiting or life-threatening condition. The resources were developed and tested specifically for this purpose with volunteers working in the homes of a child with a life-limiting condition, but might be useful for any organisation developing volunteer services.

TOP TIPS FOR FAMILY SUPPORT VOLUNTEER SERVICES WITHIN THE NHS

NHS services sometimes have volunteers helping within hospitals, community services or other venues, but people volunteering for the NHS don't usually work in people's homes.

Some NHS services have successfully set up programmes where volunteers go into people's homes to provide practical (non-medical) support. Although every NHS service is different, these top tips are offered by an NHS service running a successful Family Support Volunteering Service in the community.

Don't reinvent the wheel

- Before you do anything, find out what already exists in your area to avoid duplication and so you don't ruffle any feathers. Dove-tail with anything already set up. Contact your local volunteer bureau and talk to existing volunteers to see if there are other similar projects in the area. Perhaps there is a charity providing transport that might be worth talking to or a service offering gardening support who might be able to help. Let these types of organisations know early on about your plans and listen to advice they offer. The experience of setting up and running a volunteering service in the NHS might be different, but being informed about what helps and hinders gives you a head start.
- Understand the existing role of volunteers within your organisation or locality. Give thought to how a volunteer service that can provide support in the community can enhance the service offered by other volunteers in hospital or community venues and also the support offered by paid team members.

Get the right people on board

- Identify key strategic leads in your field and involve them in the development of your service. Attend meetings to keep them updated on progress and ambitions. Having a champion at senior leadership level will help to promote and sustain your service.

Recognise governance procedures

- Within many NHS settings, there are governance procedures that need to be followed before any promotional materials or other documents are issued. Governance meetings may make decisions about communications materials such as posters or leaflets. Build a relationship with the people organising and running these meetings to help prioritise your needs if possible. These approval meetings can be infrequent and this may slow down the promotional materials you can issue or the development of additional training. Ensure you have the timescales for agreeing materials built into your timetable.

Use existing professional links as one way to source volunteers

- Many people working within health and care services might consider volunteering, especially if they are nearing retirement. Going to 'Preparing for Retirement' meetings to promote the volunteering service might be useful, but personal professional connections might be even more key to engaging these people as volunteers. If you have a volunteer coordinator who has worked within the NHS for a while, they may have many contacts they could invite to become a volunteer. The personal touch can be a good recruitment method.

Plan for seasonal impacts on NHS settings and families, in particular winter pressures

- Children with a life-limiting or life-threatening may be more prone to illness during winter which affects families' ability to start engaging with a volunteer. Consider building this into your planning for the project and any targets you might set to help monitor performance.

Raise awareness

- There is a continuous need to keep the profile of the service in people's minds. Regular attendance at key meetings will help with this. Recruiting strategic champions (even as volunteers) may also assist.
- It may be possible to have a standing item at case discussions in team meetings about the potential to engage a volunteer.

Sustainability

- Make an early start on a business plan to sustain your service.
- Make sure families have their expectations managed around initial placements of volunteers so they don't get disillusioned if someone isn't available to help them immediately.