

Shining a spotlight on children's hospice volunteers

Together for Short Lives commissioned a survey at the end of 2012 to find out the extent and nature of volunteering within children's hospices. In this summary document we look at the key findings and make some recommendations about recognising, supporting and facilitating the fantastic work of volunteers in the sector.

Key findings from the survey include:

Current level and value of volunteering:

- Over **17,000** volunteers give their time to work for a children's hospice.
- Volunteers give **38,000** hours of their time each week to children's hospices, which is 18% of the total hours worked by paid staff and volunteers combined.
- The annual value of this donated time is **£23m** using the average wage (£11m using the minimum wage).
- The average hospice has 353 volunteers. 238 in fundraising and retail roles, 49 in roles working directly with children and families and 66 in a hospice setting but not directly with children and families.

Volunteering roles:

- **67%** of those who volunteer have roles in fundraising or retail and they give 77% of the total volunteer hours worked.
- Fundraising and retail volunteers give an average of **2** hours per week.
- 9% of volunteers work at a hospice site, but not directly with children and families, giving 13% of the total volunteer hours. **14%** of volunteers work with children and families, and they give 9% of the total volunteer hours worked.
- Those who volunteer within the hospice give an average of 1 hour 20 minutes per week.
- Volunteers make up **5%** of the total hours worked with children and families directly, by paid staff and volunteers combined.

The volunteers:

- **75%** of volunteers are **female**
- Most volunteers are in the age range **56-75**.
- Volunteers working in fundraising and retail tend to be older than those in other roles.
- Volunteers working directly with children and families tend to be younger than those in other roles, with **25% being 25 or under**.
- The ethnicity of volunteers is broadly in line with national ethnicity overall.

Innovative practice

Many children's hospices are using volunteers in innovative ways to improve the services offered to children and their families, including:

- Helping in families' homes ("Hospice neighbour"-type roles)
- Care support roles – helping the hospice care team at key times of the day such as bedtime
- Sibling support in the community and in groups
- Befriending client children (some models use young volunteers for this)
- Telephone befriending parents – pre- and post-bereavement
- Tutoring in the hospice
- Fashion shows for retail

Potential for growth:

Volunteer Managers in children's hospices believe there is room for growth in volunteering, particularly in roles working directly with children and families, and in community roles, working with families in their own homes.

This will require investment in:

- staff time to develop appropriate roles, recruit volunteers, co-ordinate their management and development
- training for staff to understand the volunteer roles and how they relate to their own roles
- training for line managers in how to manage volunteers effectively
- training for volunteers to enable them to carry out their role effectively

This is likely to be a cost effective way of growing and developing services.



Recommendations and next steps:

It is clear that volunteers already make a huge contribution to the success of children's hospices. But we believe there are great opportunities to utilise volunteers in new and innovative ways that will enable children's hospices to support more families in more ways. In a climate of increasing demand for services and increasing pressures on funding, the effective use of volunteers should play a key role in the future of children's hospice care.

In order to fulfil this potential, we would encourage all children's hospices to take a fresh look at the role that volunteers play within their organisations at a strategic level, including consideration of the following areas:

- **Resourcing and management.** The survey found that senior management are “not very” involved in managing volunteers in 53% of children's hospices. This may be a reflection of the importance that is given to volunteering within the organisation. We recommend that an equivalent level of investment should be made in managing volunteers as is made for paid staff, across all levels of management.
- **Growth in numbers and diversity.** The typical volunteer in a children's hospice is a female aged 56-75. We recommend that hospices consider how to attract a more diverse range of volunteers that reflects the communities that they serve. This could significantly increase the total volunteer workforce and will require reconsideration of methods of recruitment, training, management and stewardship of volunteers.
- **Volunteers in care roles.** Just 5% of the hours worked with children and families are made up by volunteers, with 95% being worked by paid staff. Many hospices have concerns about the extent to which volunteers can contribute to the care of children with very complex needs, but some are finding innovative ways in which to extend their offer of care through the use of volunteers in more family-facing roles. We encourage all children's hospices to consider ways in which volunteers could enhance the care that can be given to children and families, and for those already doing so to share their experience.

Together for Short Lives is committed to promoting the role of volunteers and supporting children's hospice services to extend the contribution that volunteers make to their services. We will do this in two practical ways over the coming months.

In partnership with Help the Hospices, we are developing a dedicated resource for volunteering in hospice and palliative care services. The resource will provide practical support for hospices to:

- Broaden the scope of roles that volunteers work in, including patient-facing and community roles
- Develop models for integrating volunteers with hospice clinical teams
- Be clear on regulations that apply to the work of volunteers and what needs to be in place to meet them.

We will also publicise and promote examples of children's hospice and palliative care services using volunteers in innovative ways, including patient-facing and community roles.

