

TOGETHER WE CAN

A GUIDE TO FAMILY SUPPORT VOLUNTEERING

FAST FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF FAMILY SUPPORT VOLUNTEERING SERVICES

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.

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Volunteer support for families

In the UK there are about 49,000 children with life-limiting or life-threatening conditions, which mean they may not reach adulthood. On top of caring for their child and juggling medical appointments, families can struggle with everyday tasks, like housework, shopping or spending time with their other children. Extra help from a volunteer at home can make a huge difference.

Research shows that in addition to health and care needs, families who have a child with a life-limiting or life-threatening condition need practical support.¹ Family Support Volunteers can make a valuable contribution by providing social and practical support, occupying a unique role between the professional and family caregivers. Researchers have identified a range of ways in which volunteers have been involved, including helping families in the community, providing support for the siblings of affected children, providing informal support in hospices, befriending children and young people and telephone befriending for parents after bereavement.² Sometimes volunteers even lead support in areas such as complementary therapy and pastoral care.³

Benefits of volunteer support

More than 14 million people volunteer in the UK at least once per month.⁴ Volunteering is any activity that is done to help others without being paid. Volunteering can have benefits for volunteers, for the people being supported and for the organisations providing volunteer support services.

Some potential benefits for volunteers include:

- increased self-worth and feeling of giving something back to the community
- increased skills and confidence
- 'work experience' for those considering roles in health and care
- providing a stepping stone to other things
- meeting new people

Some potential benefits for those receiving support include:

- receiving practical help at home with tasks
- someone to talk to other than health and care teams
- feeling that the community cares about them enough to lend a helping hand
- more time to spend on things that are important to them
- more time available to spend with siblings of affected children

Potential benefits for organisations running Family Support Volunteering

Services include:

- more staff time available to do other things
- adding more capacity to the services available
- ability to help volunteers achieve their goals as well as support families
- ability to offer a wider range of informal support than would be possible with paid staff
- richer working environment and new ideas with input from volunteers from many walks of life
- help with administrative work as well as support for families

In a programme coordinated by Together for Short Lives:

71% of Family Support Volunteers said they had increased skills and confidence after supporting families at home

95% of families believed that having a volunteer had helped them to cope better

100% felt they were helping others

95% of families said that having a volunteer had helped to reduce their stress

100% reported feeling valued in this programme

65% of families felt that having a volunteer helped them to feel less isolated.

100% of families who received help from a volunteer believed that their quality of life had improved

Resources with information about volunteering facts and figures and benefits

You can find out more about volunteering using the following links:

Facts and figures about volunteering

- <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/policy-and-research/volunteering-policy>
- <http://timebank.org.uk/key-facts>
- <http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/contact-us/facts-and-figures-on-volunteering>

Benefits of volunteering

- <http://www.volunteerscotland.net/volunteer/about-volunteering/benefits-of-volunteering/>
- <https://www.volunteering.nsw.gov.au/home>
- <http://richmondvale.org/benefits-of-volunteering/>
- <https://www.wcva.org.uk/volunteering>

1 Fraser et al (2015). *Children in Scotland requiring palliative care identifying numbers and needs (The ChiSP Study)*. York, University of York.

2 Carling and Howlett (2013). *Shining a spotlight on children's hospice volunteers*. Bristol, Together for Short Lives.

3 Burbeck R et al (2013). *Volunteer activity in specialist paediatric care: a national survey*. *BMJ Supportive and Palliative Care* 0:1-7.

4 <http://data.ncvo.org.uk/category/almanac/voluntary-sector/volunteering/>