

# *NHS Lothian Volunteer Experience Survey 2023*

A huge thank you to all the amazing NHS Lothian volunteers who took part in our annual Experience Survey in June 2023. This year's survey was a bit different from past years as we joined forces with other health boards across Scotland to use the same questionnaire. Our aim was to see how volunteering experiences compare across the country, all while focusing on the National Outcomes Framework for Volunteering.

We're thrilled to report that 187 volunteers participated in the survey, which is up from last year, even though the overall response rate dipped by around 5%. We suspect the shorter survey period may have contributed to this decline, as our dedicated volunteers already receive a lot of requests on top of their regular duties. Nonetheless, the responses we received are a goldmine of insights that will help us understand what's working and where we can improve.

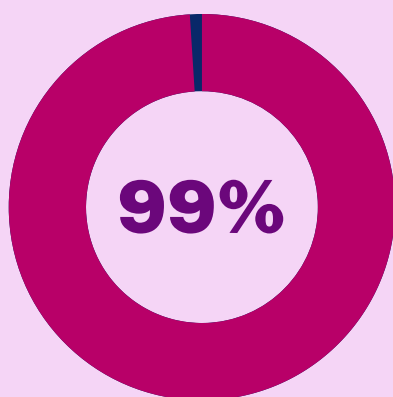
We're excited to dive into the findings and craft an action plan based on all the feedback we got. Thank you again to all our wonderful volunteers – you are the heart and soul of our NHS Lothian community!

THANK  
YOU

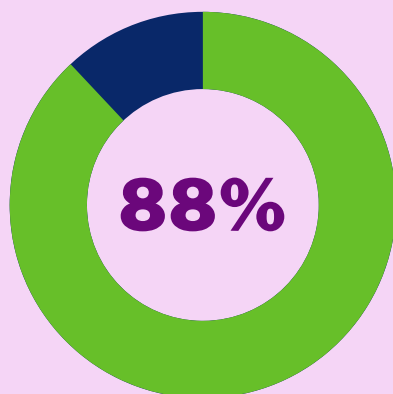
**Volunteering**

**NHS**  
Lothian

*“Dancing with a patient with Alzheimer’s whilst we hummed a tune. He loved to dance and in that short moment he wasn’t stressed or confused he was happy.”*



Agreed they are contributing to something that matters to them



Can see how their volunteering makes a difference to NHS Lothian

## Summary of Findings

**77%**

OF RESPONSES WERE FEMALE

**22%**

OF RESPONSES WERE MALE

**43%**

OF RESPONDENTS HAD BEEN VOLUNTEERING FOR 3 - 12 MONTHS

**55%**

OF RESPONDENTS WERE 41+

**34%**

OF RESPONDENTS WERE 16-21

“THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST REWARDING THINGS I HAVE EVER DONE AND THE PEOPLE I MEET ARE SO INTERESTING. IF YOU HAVE A COUPLE OF HOURS TO SPARE YOU WON’T BELIEVE THE DIFFERENCE THAT CAN MAKE. YOU CAN’T PUT A VALUE ON EVEN A 10-MINUTE CHAT. TO SEE THEM SMILE FILLS YOUR HEART.”

## ***Volunteering within NHS Lothian is flexible and responsive to my needs:***

- 95.2% agreed that they can adjust their commitments to volunteer when they need to (48.1% strongly agreed).
- 94.7% agreed that they give their time on their own terms around their lives (58.3% strongly agreed)
- 96.8% agreed that they understand their roles and how to pause, change or stop volunteering (55.1% strongly agreed)

Volunteers at NHS Lothian seem to be pretty content with the flexibility of their roles. The Voluntary Services team has been hard at work to ensure that volunteers are well-equipped to take on their tasks alongside their other commitments, and recent updates to the interview process have made it easier to work around upcoming commitments such as exams, holidays, and work etc.

It's fantastic to see that almost half of the responses strongly agree that volunteers can make adjustments while still maintaining consistency in their areas of support. Plus, we believe that volunteering should always be a choice, and we're thrilled to report that nearly all of our volunteers knew their options when it comes to stopping, pausing, or changing their commitments.

## ***Enabled and supported:***

- 100% agreed that they enjoy taking part and feel good about their volunteering (71.7% strongly agreed)
- 85.6% agreed that they receive support with access, expenses and training (49.2% strongly agreed, 14% neither agreed nor disagreed)
- 96.3% agreed that they know who to ask for help if it's needed (64.2% strongly agreed)
- 96.8% agreed that they understood the process of how to carry out their role and why it's necessary (67.4% strongly agreed)

We're over the moon to find out that every single volunteer who responded to our survey agreed or strongly agreed that they love their volunteer work and feel good about it!

When it comes to support with accessibility, expenses, and training, we noticed that 14% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. We reckon this might be because the question didn't apply to them or wasn't clear enough. To make sure all of our volunteers have opportunities to chat about these topics, we'll keep on making them a part of our recruitment and support processes.

## ***Sociable and connected:***

- 86.7% agreed that they can meet and spend time with people they want to (45.5% strongly agreed)
- 98.4% agreed that they enjoy the experience and feel part of something (66.8% strongly agreed)
- 87.7% agreed that they volunteer with and for people with common objectives (44.4% strongly agreed)

Let's break it down: while volunteers at NHS Lothian are a sociable bunch, there's room to grow in the connection department. Since most of them work solo, it's tough to bond with others, learn about their motivations, and work as a team. The Voluntary Services team are working hard to help volunteers connect with each other during and outside their shifts.

On the bright side, volunteers are having a blast and feeling like they're part of something special. It's heartening to see that they're enjoying their work and taking pride in their efforts.

## ***Valued and Appreciated:***

- 95.8% felt valued for what they bring (57.8% strongly agreed)
- 94.1% feel their contributions are appreciated (61.5% strongly agreed)
- 86.7% can see how their volunteering makes a difference to NHS Lothian (50.3% strongly agreed)

Volunteers are a huge part of NHS Lothian, and it's heartwarming to know they feel appreciated for all their hard work. However, it seems a bit fuzzy for some of them to see the difference they make to the organisation.

A big chunk of their time is spent connecting and supporting patients, and we're still figuring out how to gather feedback from staff and patients.

It's crucial we keep working to ensure our volunteers know the powerful impact they're making in their roles.

**Here's an interesting nugget:** out of five volunteers who weren't sure if they made a difference to NHS Lothian as a whole, four of them knew they were making a difference individually. Looks like we have some homework to do!

## ***Meaning and Purpose:***

- 96.2% agreed what they do is worthwhile (65.2% strongly agreed)
- 93.5% agreed they know how they make a difference (54.5% strongly agreed)
- 98.9% agreed they are contributing to something that matters to them (67.4% strongly agreed)

Let's connect the dots between our impact survey and these results. It's clear that most of our volunteers are in it to feel good, make a difference and to lend a helping hand. Our survey backs this up, showing that a bulk of them feel a sense of satisfaction from their efforts.

And, here's some more good news: every volunteering opportunity is designed to meet the needs of the NHS Lothian, and it's heartening to see that most volunteers feel their role is making an impact.

## ***Welcoming:***

- 84% agreed they feel involved as a volunteer (36.9% strongly agreed, 4.2% disagreed)
- 86.6% agreed they don't feel excluded from roles because of who they are (52.9% strongly agreed, 1.6% disagreed)
- 81.3% agreed that their knowledge, skills and experience are respected and utilised (39.6% strongly agreed, 3.2% disagreed)

We hit a bit of a rough patch with this set of questions, revealing a higher level of disagreement than in other areas. It's time to dig in and figure out what's causing this and what we can do to make improvements to give our volunteers the best experience possible. Our volunteer reference group is an essential part of this process, providing a platform for discussing new ideas and changes that could impact our volunteers. It's crucial we spread the word about this group and make sure everyone has the chance to join in.

We always take safety seriously, so all volunteering roles are thoroughly risk-assessed. While some roles may have specific requirements, we're working to create more accessible alternative roles across Lothian. We're dedicated to making sure our volunteers feel respected and valued. To achieve this, we're increasing awareness of the important role volunteers play amongst our staff to ensure they're utilised in the best and most effective way possible.

We love to tap into our volunteers' skills, experience, and knowledge, but we must ensure that this is done in line with their role descriptions and without compromising safety. After all, we're here to support and enrich, not replace.

## Area for improvement

## Actions

**Volunteers are more informed of changes in the hospital that will impact on the roles volunteers will carry out**

Voluntary Services Managers will share information of any planned changes to sites at the earliest opportunity, this may include circulating staff speed read information and site newsletters when appropriate.

**Improved signage across all sites**

NHS Lothian Charity has recently begun a commissioned piece of work looking at Wayfinding across our sites. Some volunteers have already had the opportunity to feed into this and we will share updates as we have them. We welcome all feedback from volunteers around improvements they feel can be made.

**Improved temperature across sites (entrances can be particularly cold, some wards too hot)**

Individual feedback continues to be shared with our estates and facilities colleagues where temperature is highlighted as a problem. We will review volunteer uniforms in line with these challenges too.

**More interaction and engagement from staff**

The Voluntary Services team have begun delivering an input to all newly qualified nurse training, first and second year doctor training and are contributing to a new senior charge nurse training programme. Work is also underway to feature volunteering updates across all site newsletters to raise awareness of volunteers amongst staff.

**Staff awareness of when volunteers will be in and what their role is**

The Voluntary Services team are working on volunteer notice boards across our sites which will display this information. This has proven to be successful in the RIE and St John's so far.

**More contact with voluntary services staff on evenings and weekends**

We currently offer evening and weekend training for volunteers and will continue to consider ways we can increase the support for our evening and weekend volunteers.

**More shadowing – especially for first few shifts**

We agree that shadowing is one of the most helpful parts of our volunteer induction, we are currently considering introducing a shadowing checklist for our experienced volunteers and will be looking into ways of formalising our shadowing offer as part of volunteer inductions and experienced volunteer development.

**Work with other volunteers more often, seeing different roles, more opportunities to meet other volunteers.**

We continue to review volunteering opportunities, considering possibilities for paired volunteering, development pathways, shadowing and mentoring opportunities, get togethers and social events and will endeavour to develop new ways of delivering this over the coming year.

**More face-to-face training**

Our optional training programme has seen relatively low engagement in 2023, this may be due to the online nature of the sessions therefore we will be considering alternative methods of delivery going forward. We have recently piloted face to face induction training and will be reviewing the success of this in December 2023.

**More tasks to do when on shift**

As new ideas for tasks are highlighted by staff and/or volunteers we will discuss these with the relevant staff and seek approval to add these to the volunteer role description. Unfortunately, some tasks cannot be carried out by a volunteer.

# *Volunteers' favourite moments 2023*

*"A patient with dementia saying 'this is such fun' when taking part in an activity with them."*

*"Hard to pick! I think it's all those moments that I have felt I've made a real connection with a patient; that our conversation has been a comfort to them and made them feel 'seen' or normal rather than 'just another patient in bed space 2'. Another favourite moment was finally feeling recognised by the staff and getting the sense from them that they are confident that I know what I'm doing in my role- this in turn has boosted my confidence and made me feel more part of the team."*

*"Dancing with a patient with Alzheimer's whilst we hummed a tune. He loved to dance and in that short moment he wasn't stressed or confused he was happy."*

*"Moments of real gratitude from staff and patients. Too many different and varied to write down. Uplifting the mood of the ward. Personal awareness dawning on individuals. Patients acknowledging their likes and dislikes verbally. Laughter on sharing experiences in the ward."*

*"When a patient smiles and is really happy to see you. One patient said how she looked forward to my visit, and during the week when she'd had a 'down' period she wished I'd been there to help. At times like these you realise what value your volunteering has and the difference it makes for patients."*

*"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."*

*"No one favourite moment but generally just chatting and joking with patients in the ward where I work, and while knowing they are not enjoying their medical experience feeling that even for a few minutes I am able to take their mind off those problems."*

## *Encouraging others to volunteer*

*“This is one of the most rewarding jobs I have ever done and the people I meet are so interesting. If you have a couple of hours to spare you won’t believe the difference that can make. The older generation are wise and leave me in awe with their life stories.*

*You can’t put a value on even a 10-minute chat. To see them smile fills your heart.”*

*“I think I would emphasise that there is a volunteer role that would be suitable to most people - it doesn't have to be direct interactions with patients for example. I think I would also point out the transferable skills that could be gained in all volunteer roles and the great sense of self-satisfaction to be gained from supporting the most vital service that is the NHS.”*

*“By explaining the feeling of making a contribution, patient welfare, the satisfaction of volunteering because I want to not because I have to.”*

*“I would tell them a few stories of my experiences and let them know how much it has improved my wellbeing as well as helping out staff and patients (and families)”*

**With continued thanks to our funders**

