



Hard to Reach Volunteers Project



LOTTERY FUNDED

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Foreword

We all care deeply about our NHS and our health and social care services. The Department for Health and Social Care, alongside NHS England and Public Health England, are keen to ensure that everyone is able to *influence health and social care services through the expression of their views*.

Growing the breadth of opportunities for hard to reach people to participate in volunteering and social action in health and social care will mean our services better reflect and engage with their communities. It empowers them to stay healthy and helps those close to them stay healthy too. It can offer additional support to health and care providers, and can really improve patient experience.

Healthwatch South Tyneside has worked with an impressive range of partners to share learning to help unlock and grow opportunities for hard to reach people, so enabling them to make a positive difference in health and social care. When people take part in meaningful social action there is a double benefit - they develop and improve their own confidence, skills and wellbeing, whilst making a positive difference in their communities. Simply put, everyone benefits.

I would really like to congratulate the team at Healthwatch South Tyneside and its partners for their excellent work and I am delighted to introduce this report to you.

Sue Taylor
Former HWST Co-chair and previous project lead

Acknowledgements

On behalf of Healthwatch South Tyneside I would like to acknowledge the work and participation of the following people, groups and organisations.

Sarann Valentine for the field work and drafting the report. Our Board member Margaret Adams and Manager Sheila Scott for their oversight of the project.

Cal Freeman and Newcastle University for creating the video, our volunteers for featuring in our video and telling their personal stories about the value of volunteering.

Our partner organisations for their support and allowing the project to contribute towards the production of the volunteer passport.

Sue Taylor, ex Co-chair for writing the bid which Awards for All funded; thank you Awards for All.

Peter Bower
Chair

Introduction

In 2019 Healthwatch South Tyneside (HWST) received a grant through the Awards for All (Big Lottery) fund. The grant allowed us to involve more 'Hard to Reach' people in our work. It also helped the work of Healthwatch South Tyneside (HWST) by listening to the often unheard resident's voice about health and social care services and using their feedback to influence service provision.

Healthwatch recruits volunteers from all residents across South Tyneside. With the development of this project, however, focus discussion groups have been enriched by a wider mix of people. HWST strengthened partnerships with local voluntary and community service (VCS) organisations which helped us to access more easily hard to reach people and groups to get their response to the quality of local issues.

The initial funding bid identified a set of related objectives; including the priorities of Awards for All.

The main objective was:

- **to bring people together and help build stronger relationships across communities in South Tyneside.**

The groups we sought to take part in the programme included: young people and BAME communities; individuals with physical or mental health conditions or disabilities; long term conditions; the homeless; those with a history of substance misuse; current or ex-offenders; and individuals living in disadvantaged areas (i.e. measured by indicators of deprivation).

The ‘Health Benefits of Volunteering’ film

It has been widely recognised that the film, which was produced by Newcastle University, is a long-term asset to Healthwatch and partners across the voluntary sector. It is a very effective way of interacting with new volunteers, particularly those who do not have English as a first language or who may have spectrum needs.

It was used in training sessions during the project, which helped hard to reach people understand what we do and why we do it which, gave the original idea greater reach. It also benefited from the existing volunteers of HWST being involved in the making of the film, which further strengthened the concept behind the project.

The film has proved to be an important resource, providing more opportunities such as outreach, joint working, training and signposting.

View it here: [youtube.com/watch?v=o1eA0027iWA&feature=emb_err_woyt](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1eA0027iWA&feature=emb_err_woyt)

Project strategy

The synergy between members of Healthwatch South Tyneside staff and partner organisations, supported by the board, have combined to take this project forward.

Interviews with partners and the project team confirmed that the programme of increasing access to volunteering among hard-to-reach groups, met a number of related objectives:

- Enhancing the health and well-being of individuals
- Helping people access health and social care who have to overcome barriers such as, long term health conditions or disabilities or low confidence
- Reducing social isolation and poor self-esteem
- Developing strong partnerships and improving practice
- Improving on existing ‘volunteer’ processes and procedures
- Raising awareness of Healthwatch South Tyneside and what it does.

Delivery model

To ensure the project was properly resourced, a dedicated co-ordinator was funded from the grant. Partner groups were contacted, the purpose of the work was explained and the groups, set up to help hard to reach people, were asked if they would like to take part. Focus groups were established and, through open questions and active listening evidence of need was fed back.

In addition, thought was given to how the volunteering could be made accessible to hard to reach people. Through links with Newcastle University we were able to make a video which involved our volunteers, who spread the word about how good it is to volunteer. The model ensured that the video would be available for all to use in the future.

Partnership working

Local partners and our volunteers were identified as the resources for making the project a success. The programme is now working with an increasingly diverse range of providers. Working with partners has enhanced the scope, reach and effectiveness of the programme in a number of ways including opportunities to:

- Bring in additional expertise to support clients
- Secure outreach venues
- Build the capacity of the programme.

The groups included members who are currently experiencing or come from:

- Physical disabilities
- Ethnic minority groups
- The unemployed with no formal qualifications
- Sensory impairment
- Long term health conditions
- Homelessness
- Addiction recovery
- Caring roles
- The Autism Spectrum
- Mental health concerns
- Poverty
- Learning difficulties
- The LGBTQ communities
- Bereavement and palliative care concerns
- Isolation and loneliness
- Lone parenting
- Ex or current offenders.

However, some challenges were encountered in keeping everyone engaged throughout the project, such as:

- Low staffing numbers
- Limited volunteer capacity
- Low budget capability
- Changing staff teams
- Relocation of premises.

Evaluation

The aim of this evaluation is to assess the impact of the Project upon the people and organisations involved. It reviews the core of the bid: to make a positive difference in health and social care of hard to reach groups through contact with volunteers and partner organisations.

The evaluation looks at the impact of the programme based on feedback to the end of March 2020.

The main aims

- To seek out and encourage more people from 'hard to reach groups' to volunteer. In this way help them to break down their barriers about engaging with others, with the goal of improving their lives and enjoying the benefits of volunteering in general and, in particular, for Healthwatch South Tyneside.
- To record how they feel about their well-being and to try, by the social contact offered through volunteering, to improve their mental and physical health and reduce their social isolation and increase their confidence i.e. improve their quality of life.
- To produce a film with the help of our volunteers to inform people about the benefits of volunteering.
- To extend the existing reach of Healthwatch South Tyneside.

Enhanced working with the organisations/groups below enabled HWST to access more easily hard to reach people in response to local health and social care issues which affect their lives.

- **Apna Ghar**
The first generic training session has already taken place and a new session is under discussion. Keen to work around sexual health concerns for young people.
- **AutismAble**
Two training sessions have taken place. HWST staff have also organised a meeting to liaise with AutismAble staff to design new forms.
- **Action Stations**
HWST has now been invited to three mental health groups to give clients a voice.
- **ACTS**
Working with HWST there are at least three possible projects going forward. One is a new project which will enable staff and volunteers from Age Concern to provide HWST with feedback from individuals in future months. This is envisioned to reach hundreds of previously unknown participants.

- **Alzheimer's Society**
A number of carers groups have expressed an interest in using the individual report forms and discussion group forms, they are also keen to link into future projects with the deaf community.
- **Bliss=Ability**
To attract more volunteers HWST has been invited to take part in a Development Day. We are also currently looking to fund a project from this grant for the hard of hearing, which will involve volunteers learning basic signing techniques which will help volunteers liaise with Deaf Services.
- **Carers Association**
HWST have attended, and been invited back, to groups about how carers feed back into HWST. The groups include the young and elderly carers and addiction recovery.
- **FACT (Fighting All Cancers Together)**
HWST have been invited to attend groups which discuss issues around cancer and bereavement care.
- **Inspire**
Thanks to the Hard to Reach Project we are working with Inspire and the volunteerco-ordinators to help them refine and launch the Volunteers Passport. This will not only benefit HWST volunteers but those across the whole of South Tyneside.
- **Mental Health Concern**
They have agreed to hold regular focus discussions for HWST, and we have been invited to attend groups regularly.
- **Moving Forward**
HWST already have some feedback and we have been invited to all future groups that are convenient for both parties to attend and gain views or aid discussion.
- **Northern Sign**
Will give help where necessary to hearing impairment groups.
- **NEPACS (North Eastern Prison After Care Society)**
The links with NEPACS are still under discussion.
- **STREF (South Tyneside Regional Equality Forum)**
HWST continue to attend meetings, thus forging new contacts and holding discussions with regional groups e.g. minority groups and the travelling community.

- **WHIST (Women's Health in South Tyneside)**
HWST has the offer of attending any group that WHIST is holding: women only. They have also offered to join in with volunteers for the signing workshop.
- **Your Voice Counts (YVC)**
Various ways that HWST are linking in with this organisation - including individual feedback and focus groups.

HWST attended three groups - Your Voice Counts, Apna Ghar and the Carers Association and held conversations about how they felt about their daily lives. The overall attendance was encouraging, with 15 participants from YVC and the Carers Association and 14 participants from Apna Ghar. The sessions gave valuable feedback on how individuals coped and suggestions were made for making improvements to their health and well-being.

The health and wellbeing impact on both volunteers and partner organisations

Volunteering

- Contributes to society, both socially and economically
- Widens social and cultural networks, thus building bridges between people and communities
- Gives people who are sometimes excluded from society a chance to contribute and feel valued, creating greater inclusion
- Enhances self-esteem, building key skills and experience
- Adds to an individual's learning
- Develops and enhances employability and shows altruism on a person's C.V.
- Uses people's energy and enthusiasm for the greater good of communities
- Promotes better physical and mental well-being
- Fosters a "can-do" attitude, thus enabling people
- Helps people to make new friends and socialise
- Gain useful contacts for the future
- Ascertain whether the type of work suits the volunteer
- Helps gain qualifications and/or accreditation
- Benefits the community in general; and
- The Volunteer Passport will enable volunteers to move across organisations and gain a mix of experiences.

Partner organisations

- Overall achievement against expectations, both staffing resources and financial implications has been exceeded
- Ability to engage and support hard to reach individuals has been increased
- Have seen outcomes experienced by participants, in relation to volunteering, health and well-being and community involvement improve.

Conclusions and key findings

Overall summary of impact

Under the original proposal, as a Healthwatch led volunteer recruitment programme, it underperformed. This was seen as a legitimate challenge, rather than a negative issue that was causing problems. As a consequence, the work was changed to a partnership focus and the results have exceeded the plan. This shows the clear benefit of working receptively with partners.

These findings suggest the model of:

- Intensive, bespoke and innovative forms of support
- Involving current volunteers in a film about their stories
- Working with the family of partners with similar aims is a very effective way of increasing access to volunteering for hard to reach people.

Moreover, it is a model that works with comparatively modest funds. As the programme shows, it is not only helpful in locating and recruiting volunteers but it provides a common basis for continued partnership working.

In summary with respect to:

- Volunteering - Healthwatch South Tyneside is interacting with more groups
- Health and well-being - we are holding more discussion groups and gaining valuable feedback
- Partnership working - is far more joined and diverse and joint agency working is anticipated to increase.

Recommendations

1. Consult partner organisations to reduce the duplication of engagement with and increase the exchange of information gathered from the same groups of people.
2. Circulate the Project Report:
 - by posting it on our website and through our social media outlets
 - through the partnership network in South Tyneside
 - to all Healthwatch using the Healthwatch England Workplace network.

Postscript

All this work with people and partners was done before COVID-19 hit. Unfortunately, its impact has been devastating to communities and stopped almost all development; including making the planned progress with this project. The work will not be lost, so taking words from the vision of the NCVO: “we can all make a difference to the causes that we believe in” and start with renewed vigour after we have defeated the virus.

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