

The power of youth volunteering

*Learning from the
Pears #iwill Fund
NHS Network*

May 2022



Commissioned by:



Authorship and acknowledgements

This report has been written by Annie Caffyn and Eliza Buckley, based on work carried out by the authors and Rebecca Moran, Emily Dyson, Sonakshi Anand, Charlotte Pace and Natalie Corlett.

We are grateful for the opportunity to listen and learn with the Pears Foundation, as well as the 32 participating NHS Trusts and their respective charities awarded the Pears #iwill Fund. Together we have explored the value of youth volunteering in the community and the lasting legacy grants such as the Pears #iwill Fund can have.

Firstly, thank you to the Pears #iwill Fund partners: Pears Foundation, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, #iwill and The National Lottery Community Fund for creating this innovative funding programme. Thank you, also, for the continued support, guidance and advocacy of Pears Foundation, #iwill and NHS England and NHS Improvement during this learning project.

Thank you to NHS Trusts who supplied photography for this work, including:

- Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS Trust
- Cardiff and Vale University Health Board
- Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- Edinburgh and Lothian Health Foundation
- Hull University Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust (HUTH)
- Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group
- Royal Free NHS Foundation Trust
- University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust
- West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust

The front cover image was supplied by Cardiff and Vale University Health Board.

Please note that some of the photos supplied by Trusts were taken before the Covid-19 pandemic.

A special thank you

A special thank you to the 32 NHS Trusts and their respective charities listed below for the contribution and enthusiasm from colleagues leading youth volunteering:

- Airedale NHS Foundation Trust
- Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS Trust
- Cambridge University Hospitals
- Cardiff and Vale University Health Board
- Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- Chesterfield Royal Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust
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- Hull University Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust (HUTH)
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- King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust (LTHT)
- Manchester University NHS Trust
- North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust
- Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust
- Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
- Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust
- Royal Free NHS Foundation Trust
- Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust
- Sheffield Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- South London and Maudsley NHS Trust
- Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust
- University College London Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (UCLH)
- University Hospitals Bristol
- University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust
- University Hospital Dorset
- University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust
- University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust
- West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust
- Yeovil District Hospital NHS Trust
- West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust
- Yeovil District Hospital NHS Trust

How to cite this report:

Buckley, E. and Caffyn, A. (2022) The power of youth volunteering: Learning from the Pears #iwill Fund NHS Network. London: Institute for Voluntary Action Research.

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Foreword

The contribution of volunteers within the NHS has always been enormously valued by our patients and staff, and also has many benefits for those who take part. For young people it is often the first step towards an exciting and varied career in health and care.

The importance and impact of our volunteers is recognised in the NHS Long Term Plan. It is also vital, of course, that we support those who give us their time and make sure that volunteering opportunities are available to people from all of our communities, and from different age groups.

That is why NHS England was keen to work with the Pears #iwill Fund to amplify their support for embedding youth volunteering and youth social action in health and care settings. In the NHS we know that young people help to drive positive change in health services in many ways, for example by bringing new ideas and insight through our hospital youth forums.

This report focuses on youth volunteering. It highlights how NHS trusts took up the challenge to do something different and created relevant volunteering roles for young people, often in partnership with local schools, colleges and the VCSE sector, and the results were transformational.

NHS England provided the trusts with infrastructure support and guidance and showcased their best practice and innovation. This included sharing how many trusts were able to increase the diversity of their young volunteers.

This report clearly demonstrates that supporting voluntary services to bring more young volunteers into health settings works well, both for the young people and for the host organisations.

The difference these opportunities make to young people is immense and truly powerful. They have told us they made new friends, built their confidence and skills, and developed a real enthusiasm to learn more about careers in health and care.

From our point of view, NHS organisations are growing their own future workforce both from the volunteer group and through their stronger connections across local education systems. We also know that young volunteers contribute to better health outcomes for patients and can enhance the care experience of those they care for.

That is why the NHS will continue to value and develop youth volunteering, and this report will contribute to that work.



Neil Churchill OBE

Director for Experience, Participation and Equalities
NHS England and NHS Improvement

Introduction

The #iwill Movement involves over 1,000 organisations and 700 young ambassadors and champions from across the UK, sharing the belief that *'all children and young people should be supported and empowered to make a positive difference on the issues that affect their lives, their communities, and broader society'*. The [#iwill Fund](#) is made possible thanks to a joint investment from The National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to support young people to access high quality social action opportunities.

In 2017, Pears Foundation became a match-funder of the #iwill Fund, and, in partnership with DCMS and NLCF, created the Pears #iwill Fund to support the creation of new youth social action opportunities in health and social care, education and the environment. As part of this work, the Pears #iwill Fund has supported youth volunteering in NHS Trusts across England.

In September 2017, the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) was appointed as learning partner to support the Pears #iwill Fund by facilitating learning within the network of funded NHS Trusts to help develop and share approaches to youth volunteering in health settings. The overarching ambition of the network was to:

- Embed youth volunteering into health settings and improve the range of volunteering opportunities available for young people
- Increase the numbers and diversity of young people volunteering in health settings
- Raise the profile of youth engagement in health settings – highlighting the value young volunteers can bring

Our work as a learning partner focused on facilitating the network and providing peer learning support to volunteer managers and volunteer coordinators¹ funded through the Pears #iwill Fund. We developed and delivered an iterative, flexible learning programme that allowed funded NHS Trusts to share and learn from peers and create spaces for both celebrations and exploring challenges. We used a combination of remote and face-to-face delivery to respond to the needs of members of the network. Our work has included (See Appendix One for further details):

- Annual learning events
- Thematic and regional working groups
- Peer support drop-in sessions
- Online forum (Slack channel)
- Website resource area
- Ad hoc advice and support to individual Trusts
- Connecting with other relevant initiatives in youth volunteering and health
- Strategic stakeholder briefings between Pears Foundation, NHS England & NHS Improvement and IVAR.

¹ This report will use the term Voluntary Services Team to refer to volunteer managers and coordinators.

This report draws on the above activities, using anonymised quotations and data to share learning about the power of youth volunteering in health.

About the Pears #iwill Fund NHS Peer Network

The Pears #iwill Fund Peer Network comprises of 32 NHS Trusts:

- Airedale NHS Foundation Trust
- Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS Trust
- Cambridge University Hospitals
- Cardiff and Vale University Health Board
- Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- Chesterfield Royal Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust
- Edinburgh and Lothian Health Foundation
- Hull University Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust (HUTH)
- Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust
- Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group
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- University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust
- West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust
- Yeovil District Hospital NHS Trust
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- Yeovil District Hospital NHS Trust



Photo credit: Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

The Pears #iwill Fund Peer Network was founded on the principle of collaboration between Voluntary Services Teams who shared processes, approaches and resources between Trusts. We then worked with individual Trusts and with the Network as a collective to adapt learning to local needs and contexts.

The Peer Network was designed to accommodate and support a range of approaches to youth volunteering – starting from a hypothesis that there would not be a ‘one size fits all’ approach to the set-up and delivery of youth volunteering. The Fund’s emphasis was on delivering youth volunteering opportunities that were tailored to local needs and practice.

Trusts were recruited to the programme with the intention of supporting a range of youth engagement approaches, with programmes varying in scale, size, and focus. Some Trusts within the Network were at the early stages of implementing youth volunteering, while others were building on years of experience.

Pears #iwill Fund grants were intended to support Trusts to adapt and deliver youth volunteering programmes that met the needs of their individual young people, institutions and localities. Examples included: funding core salary costs for Youth Volunteer Coordinator posts; allowing Trusts to report in whatever way they felt was meaningful; resourcing learning (via support from IVAR as learning partner); enabling Trusts to pause or adapt their youth volunteering programmes as needed; including expenses in the budget to enable secondment or backfilling of staff; partnership building with youth organisations and the resourcing of youth leadership/co-design opportunities.



We need young people engaged in our communities and not to be discounted as a generation that's technology obsessed and lacks perspective. We are an incredibly driven and passionate generation that can do a world of good and social media is our "superpower". To unleash our potential we need support, opportunities, and inspiration to volunteer.

Young volunteer

Photo credit: Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Part One: Key messages

Voluntary Services Teams are the key

Finding the right people to develop youth volunteering programmes is essential: early on, find or recruit determined, creative and tenacious individuals and work to support and resource them. The success of the Pears #iwill NHS Network is largely due to the commitment of Voluntary Services Teams across the Network.

Investing in young volunteers brings huge value

We've seen the commitment, time, energy, and funds that it takes to set up programmes and get them off the ground, as well as to sustain and grow youth volunteering in Trusts. We've seen the persistence from Trusts to find the right kind of approach for their own Trust: whether that's tailoring their approach to engaging young people, or their approach to securing buy-in from senior members of the Trust and nurses on the wards – this has been so inspiring to learn from. Alongside this, we've seen the huge benefit for patients and staff that comes from this investment of resource, commitment and care. If you invest time in young volunteers, the rewards are huge.

No 'one size fits all' for youth volunteering

No 'one size fits all' in terms of approach to supporting and creating youth volunteering opportunities. Pears #iwill Youth Volunteer Coordinators needed to be resourceful and adaptable to build programmes that tailored to the wide ranging needs of young people. Trusts across the Pears #iwill Network worked in different ways to engage young people in volunteering, operating at varying scales and with different focuses. During Covid-19, they also faced different local restrictions and challenges. Although Trusts are part of a collective network, the emphasis is on tailoring youth volunteer projects to local needs and practice. Many of the Pears #iwill Trusts started small, on one ward, and built up from there, testing out ideas, listening and learning from young people as they grew (and continue to grow) youth volunteering programmes.

Collaborative spirit and partnership working are crucial

The Pears #iwill Network learned together, sharing ideas and challenges, pooling expertise, and supporting each other. Local networks were also essential to delivering meaningful volunteering opportunities. Schools, community projects and internal departments in the Trusts (e.g. the communications teams, the patient experience teams) worked together to identify the young people they hoped to reach and delivered approaches to achieve that. Wider support from the #iwill movement, NHS England and NHS Improvement, and youth organisations (for example, Duke of Edinburgh Award) has connected the Network to other health and volunteering initiatives.

The Pears #iwill Network has been characterised by collaboration, opportunism and connection. The value of the Network has been in providing support, learning, sharing of resources and practice development. Most importantly, this helped volunteer coordinators to feel connected in an otherwise potentially isolated role and meant time was spent on delivering excellent volunteering programmes rather than reinventing the wheel. Volunteer coordinators across the Network ring-fenced time to build relationships.

Sustain youth volunteering by thinking from the beginning about how it fits with Trust strategy

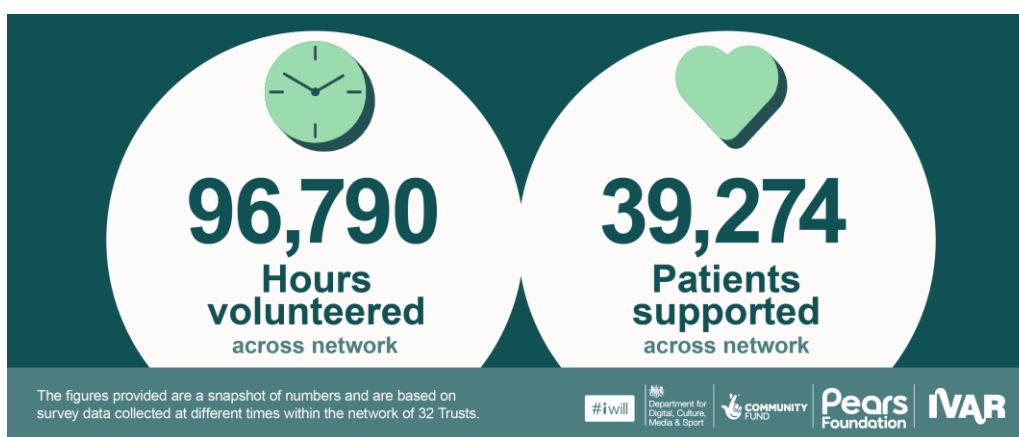
The Pears #iwill Fund set out to help embed youth volunteering practices within health settings. To have a successful start meant engaging with senior stakeholders early on, beginning small and working with young people to test and refine approaches. These features are also key to continuing youth volunteering approaches beyond the Pears #iwill Fund and have helped to sustain: the quality of approaches; strategic buy-in and alignment; and resourcing for specific youth-focused posts.

Part Two: Achievements of the Network

This section explores the achievements of the Network and showcases the value of youth volunteering across NHS Trusts. It looks at:

- Benefits to young people
- Benefits to medical staff and patients
- Changes to strategy and practice

It is clear that young people bring huge value to health settings. They have proved to be an essential part of supporting patients and staff in extreme circumstances during Covid-19. The Network demonstrates the value that youth volunteering brings to young people, their communities, and to medical staff and patients. Despite the challenge of Covid-19, in 2020-2021, some Trusts supported up to 365 young volunteers who worked with more than 39,274 patients and we saw at least² 96,970 hours volunteered by young people across the Network.



Trusts are measuring this impact in different ways. Some are early on in their youth volunteering journey or are supporting young people to work in high impact roles, which require more intense work with a smaller number of volunteers. The programme therefore recognised that collecting cumulative data for the Network as a whole would not be meaningful, appropriate or useful. Success is about more than hours of volunteering and numbers of patients supported – it is also about the commitment of staff and the unique value young people bring to the NHS Trust settings.

² The figures provided are a snapshot of numbers and are based on survey data collected at different times within the network of 32 Trusts.



Every day I came out happier than when I went in.

Young volunteer

Photo credit: Cardiff and Vale University Health Board

2.1 Benefits to young people

Increased confidence and skills

The benefits of youth volunteering in building confidence, skills and wellbeing are well documented.³ Across the Pears #iwill Fund Network we heard powerful stories of how volunteering as part of a healthcare team transformed young people's confidence, outlook and aspirations.

Young people progressed from feeling unable to speak to colleagues and staff to interacting with patients and staff, and taking up other opportunities within the hospital:

'Volunteering has given me more confidence; better communication, and I have learnt about the hospital system. If anyone is thinking about getting involved, or has the opportunity, give it a go. Hospitals are truly a magical place.'

Young volunteer

'You learn a lot about yourself volunteering; I am made of strong stuff really!'

Young volunteer

'Volunteering has been the best thing I've done for myself. Volunteering helped me be the person I am today.'

Young volunteer

The work of Pears #iwill Fund Trusts is helping young people develop a wide range of skills – including health care, professional working/settings, support services. Youth volunteering consistently provides access to experiential learning opportunities outside the setting of formal education:

'Not only is this about helping people, but it's also about developing yourself.'

Young volunteer

'I believe these opportunities being available to the youth is great as we get to learn many things not taught in schools and college.'

Young volunteer

'I volunteered alongside a retired nurse. We were like bookends – she was at the end of her career and I was at the start of mine. I learnt so much from her.'

Young volunteer

'It is so rewarding to see the commitment and enthusiasm shown by our young volunteers and to see how young people develop on a personal level and grow in confidence and gain valuable skills that cannot be learnt in a classroom.'

Volunteer Coordinator

³ Dartington Service Design Lab (July 2019) [Youth Social Action and Outcomes for Young People](#), The Kings Fund (2022): [Our work on volunteering in health and social care](#)

During Covid-19, NHS Trusts that were able to continue with volunteering programmes helped young volunteers to adapt and respond to changing needs and rules, working through a time of great upheaval:

'Adaptability was a big thing – we had our training but we had to adapt to this. Rules have changed in the hospital ... it's hard to say to a parent that we can only let one parent in, even though they've got a sick child.'

Young volunteer

Volunteering stories

These stories were produced in collaboration with IVAR and young people who took part in a youth research panel for the Pears #iwill Fund



Rosie

'Youth volunteering in Dorset County Hospital'

Rosie, young volunteer at the Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, shares stories to showcase the value of youth volunteering programmes.

[Watch the video](#)



Beth

'Youth volunteering in Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS Foundation Trust'

This briefing by Beth – a young volunteer at Birmingham Women's and Children's Hospital – shares the experiences and value of youth volunteering in hospitals through a collection of stories.

[Read the briefing](#)

Volunteer to career pathways

The skills and confidence built through volunteering within the Pears #iwill Fund has helped young people to prepare for future careers and decide whether they want to pursue a career in healthcare:

'As a young person it is often difficult to get opportunities to gain experience without having specialised training. It is so important that opportunities like this are more widely available to young people as it gives us the best start to our career as we become the scientists, doctors, nurses and teachers of tomorrow.'

Young volunteer

'I think it's really important to have young people volunteering in the NHS and it has helped me to consider my options for my career. I didn't even know how many jobs there were to do in the pathology department let alone the whole hospital!'

Young volunteer

'I've learnt good workplace dynamics and the positive energy shared by fantastic role models in the department.'

Young volunteer

Some young people have used their volunteering as a springboard and are progressing into careers in healthcare:

'I think volunteering gave me an edge. There was a lot of competition for the job [clinical support worker] but I was able to talk about volunteering at my interview and on my application form. I was able to demonstrate I knew the hospital, I had experience interacting with patients and families.'

Young volunteer

'I have recently started to study children's nursing; I hope to have placements at [NHS Trust] and maybe even a job at the end of the course. Volunteering has given me more confidence; better communication, and I have learnt about the hospital system.'

Young volunteer



Alicia

'Alicia's story: From volunteering to a career in the NHS'

Alicia's acquired knowledge, skills and confidence from volunteering at NHS Lothian helped her to secure a role as a clinical Support Worker.

[Read the blog](#)

A sense of connection and purpose

Finally, volunteering is giving young people a sense of purpose and connection to their hospital or local community:

'I feel that I am part of something BIG. The feeling of solidarity in hospitals is tangible with everything that's going on and it's been really incredible to be a part of that. I know it's a cliché, but it feels good to do good!! Whether I'm part of a huge change, or just helping out a little bit day by day, I feel so much better than doing nothing at all!'

Young volunteer

Those who volunteered during Covid-19 felt this even more keenly, as it helped them to make a meaningful contribution during the emergency:

'I felt like I needed to do something. We had our online youth meeting, but it didn't feel sufficient. It felt great to go somewhere and actually contribute to the community instead of being in my bedroom on a Saturday. When everything's locked down, it was really fulfilling for me to be able to get out and do something.'

Young volunteer

2.2 Benefits to medical staff and patients

Young volunteers across the Network were referred to as '*an extra pair of hands*' for medical staff, taking pressure off teams and clinicians allowing them to dedicate resource and time with patients. NHS staff value both the additional capacity and the specific qualities young volunteers bring:

'It was evident that the patients and the ward staff were always appreciative of our help, and I really enjoyed knowing that I was making a difference to somebody's day.'

Young volunteer

'Young volunteers bring skills, enthusiasm, energy and ideas'

Hospital staff member

'Departments are seeing young volunteers as a bright shining light in all this.'

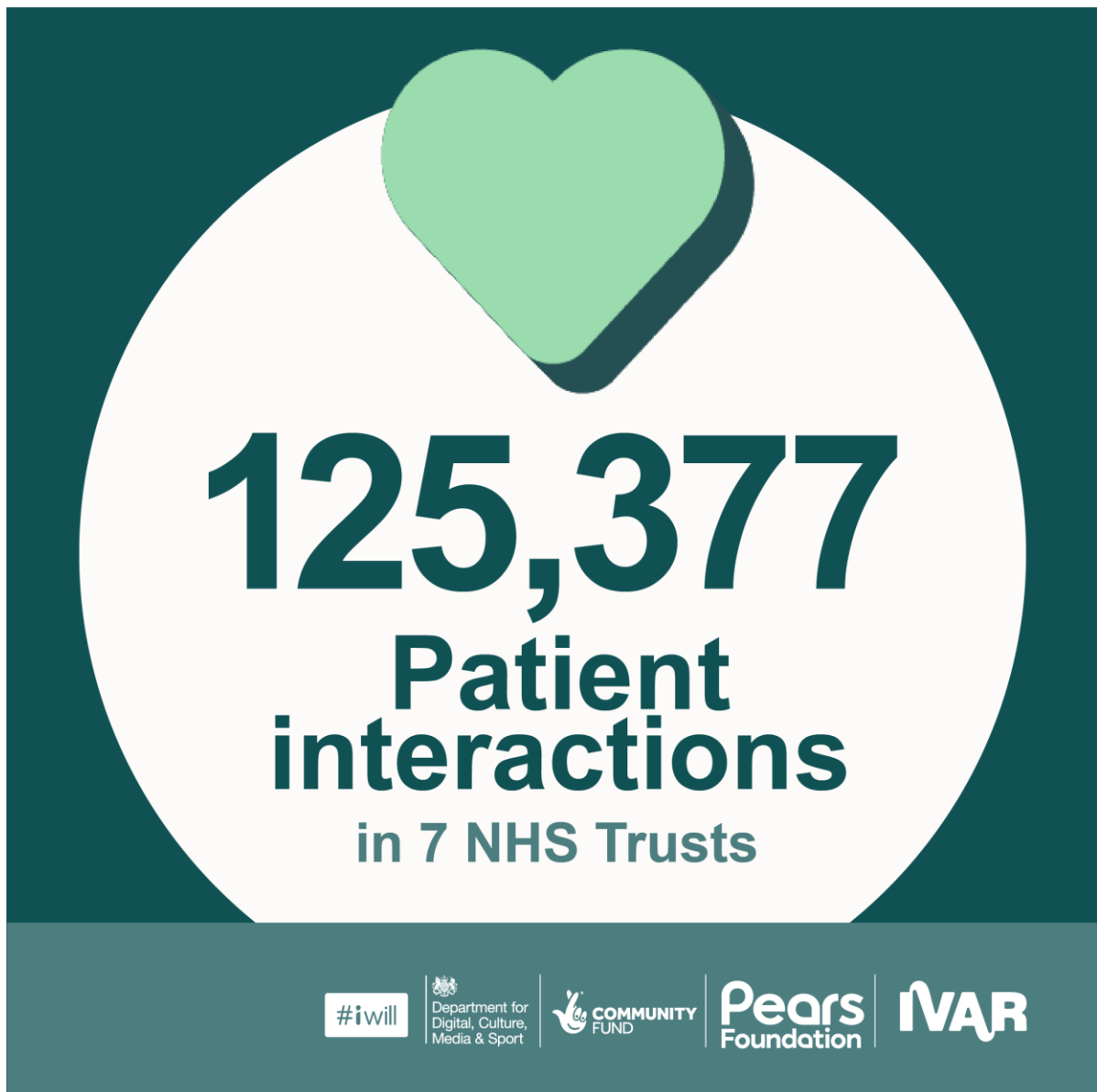
Hospital staff member

'I have learnt that medical staff really want to promote their field to young people. Small changes can make a big difference.'

Volunteer Manager

'You're doing something that is appreciated, and it is really nice. You get so many thank-you's from the staff and patients. It does make a difference – a huge difference.'

Young volunteer



A significant number of roles for young volunteers included directly supporting patients, for example, befriending schemes and support at meal times. From January 2020 to September 2021, more than 125,377 patients (across seven Trusts) were supported by young Pears #iwill Fund volunteers:

'These volunteers offered the most valuable gift – their time. Their great generosity has had a profound and lasting impact on our patients and the community as a whole. They have started to forge a new path in patient experience, adding volunteers' influence as a positive impact for the patient.'

Hospital staff member

Volunteers reflected on the support they had provided to patients:

'It's given me appreciation for the impact that having someone like myself, with no clinical training, can have in helping someone feel more comfortable during their stay.'

Young volunteer



Photo credit: Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group

[During Covid-19, young people stepped up to provide in-hospital support to patients in a wide variety of roles.](#) This contribution was particularly valued due to the need for many long-standing volunteers needing, or choosing, to step back as they were in older, more at risk, age groups. At the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust, 18-25 year olds comprised 50% of the volunteer workforce at one stage during Covid-19:

'I first decided to volunteer for the trust when the Coronavirus pandemic meant that there was a possibility that the NHS might be overwhelmed. I wanted to be able to do my bit to help in these uncertain times.'

Young volunteer

Meet and greet screening volunteer role during Covid-19



Young volunteers at Birmingham Children's Hospital supported staff front of house. Their responsibilities were to:

- Screen visitors and patients for Covid-19 symptoms before they entered the hospital
- Provide visitors with a face mask if they didn't have one of their own
- Direct visitors to their destinations for appointments and consultations
- Help visitors with any general enquiries
- Be a friendly first point of contact for patients and visitors

'The highlight of my role has to be the positive interactions that I've had with patients, families and staff.'

'My communication and confidence skills have improved a lot. I have done over 100 hours of volunteering in the Covid-19 period to date and have spoken to hundreds of people.'

[Read the blog](#)

Voluntary Response Hub in West Hertfordshire Hospital NHS Trust



Photo credit: West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust

The Voluntary Services Team at West Hertfordshire Hospital in Watford redeveloped services over a two-week period and created the Voluntary Response Hub. From 30 March 2020, a group of young people volunteered *‘with a smile, positive attitude, engagement and the belief that only together can we survive this difficult time’*. (Volunteer Coordinator).

The Response Hub had in-person training for volunteers on what to expect:

‘The way we prepared them to see hospital in a new way, to see nurses and doctors with full PPE, they understood the potential risk’.

Volunteers befriended patients and ran errands to support staff:

‘We created a process so everything was recorded electronically. We asked volunteers to make sure staff had enough water and food. Every three hours, we made sure the Covid ward staff had enough snacks that had been donated to us’. There were 176 daily tasks for volunteers at one point in July 2020:

‘Our Trust wasn’t prepared to know how to help the staff and the patients. But once we created the strategy, it enabled us to build a great partnership and collaboration with the clinical staff.’

‘We’re very proud of our volunteers. Never underestimate young people, they can do so much if you have clear and good communication with them.’

‘These volunteers offered the most valuable gift – their time. Their great generosity has had a profound and lasting impact on our patients and the community as a whole. They have started to forge a new path in patient experience, adding volunteers’ influence as a positive impact for the patient.’

Making surgical gowns during Covid-19



Photo credit: Royal Free
NHS Foundation Trust

Royal Free Hospital's Hampstead Gown Factory made over 50,000 surgical gowns:

'I'm personally incredibly humbled by the commitment and the care for the community and the Trust that the volunteers have shown ... I'm deeply humbled. As soon as we could, we expanded the project to under 18 year olds, sorted out safeguarding issues and they responded well to being in a new and structured environment, learning new skills, making friends. As a charity we are humbled.'

'It's amazing to see humanity at its best in the local community. It shows what we are capable of in times of adversity.'

[Read the blog](#)

2.3 Changes to strategy and practice

Alongside achieving benefits for young people, staff and patients, the Pears #iwill Fund Peer Network has also led to changes in strategy and practice. These achievements are summarised here and further detail is provided in Section 3.

Embedding youth volunteering in strategy

In order to provide lasting volunteering opportunities for young people, Trusts are working to [embed youth volunteering within their NHS Trusts](#). This means aligning the value of youth volunteer programmes with Trust strategy and supporting staff to recognise the value that young volunteers bring. Voluntary Services Teams are developing programmes that have *'enough structure but with flex'* to be able to mould existing systems and processes to be suitable for youth volunteering programmes.

Trusts have moved away from volunteering roles that focus on the benefits to the young people, and instead sought to [demonstrate the value that volunteers have as an integral part of the workforce](#): *'They are an investment that has impact in the long run'*. Within some Trusts, young volunteers are no longer seen as an add-on within the volunteering offer:

'Network colleagues have highlighted the value of focusing on quality not quantity as the foundation for embedding young people into the Trust's mainstream volunteering.'

Volunteer Coordinator

Widening access to volunteering opportunities

Since 2017, Trusts across the Network have tailored and trialled roles and recruitment routes to develop inclusive practices for engaging young volunteers:

- with specific educational needs or a disability
- not in education, employment or training
- from low socio-economic backgrounds
- from ethnic minority backgrounds
- under 16 years old

Voluntary Services Teams have developed a wide range of volunteering roles and support mechanisms to accommodate the variety of young people with whom they work, and to attract young people who might not traditionally have engaged. This has included, [adapting existing roles to young people's needs and skillsets](#) and focusing on *quality*, matching young people with roles that fit their experience and skills, rather than *quantity* of hours. For example, working with young people under 16 requires [volunteering outside of traditional ward roles](#). In UCLH, this meant developing a scheme for under 16-year-olds to come and perform for patients, and, in Birmingham Women and Children's Hospital, they ran a summer programme for Junior Volunteers (10-16s).

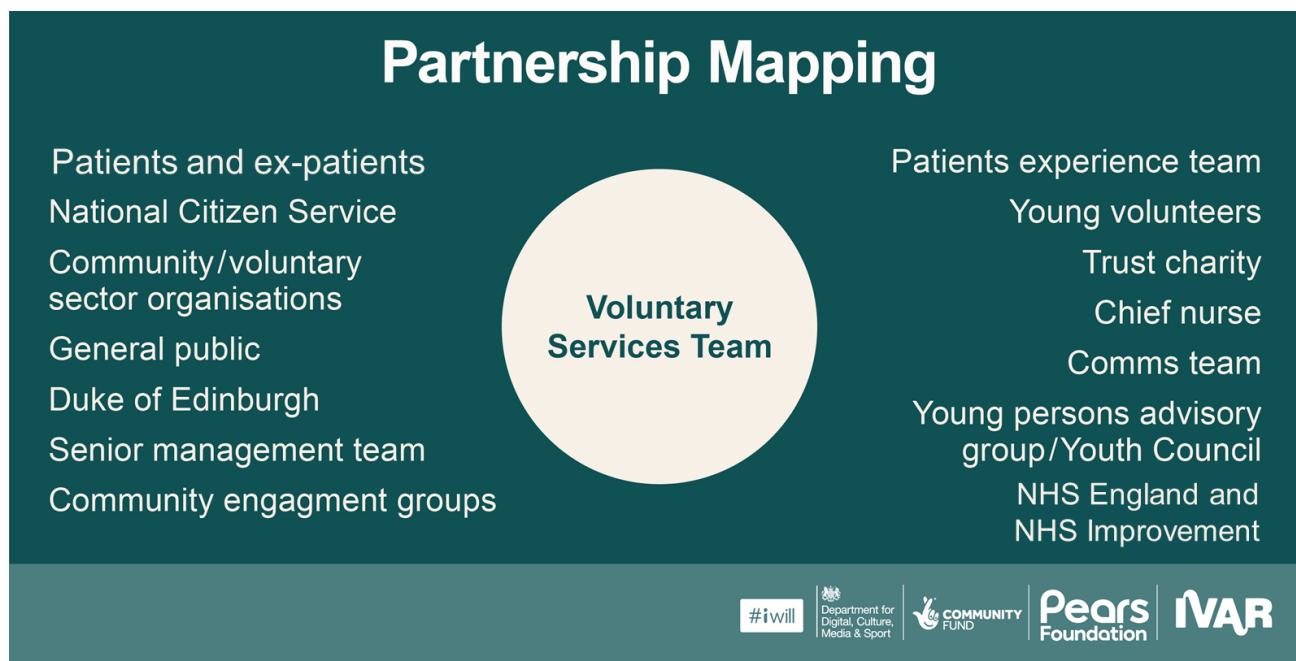
In developing more inclusive roles, Trusts have explored connections in their local community. For example:

- UCLH worked with schools that had high percentages of children eligible for free school meals and also ran a session with the Red Cross and a local charity to engage young refugees and asylum seekers
- University Hospital Dorset worked with the Police and National Citizen Service as part of plans to widen access to youth volunteering in their Trusts
- Manchester Universities NHS Foundation Trust supported young volunteers with the National volunteering certificate and other educational opportunities
- Trusts have worked with the Duke of Edinburgh Award (supporting the [Approved Activity Provider guidance for NHS Trusts](#))

Partnership working

The principle of collaboration has run throughout the Pears #iwill Fund, as Voluntary Services Teams sought to build relationships with communications teams, patient experience teams; and externally, with partners in local communities and within the Network itself, sharing experiences, learning and resource between the 32 NHS Trusts.

To develop successful volunteering programmes, the Pears #iwill Fund Trusts work with local schools, colleges, businesses and community groups. They have identified allies and partners, working to map networks and understand where individual volunteering programmes sit in the local infrastructure. This approach has been central to creating recruitment paths, meaningful roles and exit pathways for young people.



Trusts have developed inclusive and wrap-around approaches for young people by 'creating a spider's web of partnerships'. For example, making connections with local community groups and youth clubs, and establishing a strong relationship with the Trusts' equality teams.

Part Three: Making it work – sharing our collective learning



Photo credit University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust

In this section, we draw out learning on developing, embedding and sustaining youth volunteering programmes from the collective experience of the 32 NHS Trusts. The following audiences are addressed:

- Individuals and teams setting up/designing a youth volunteering programme in NHS Trusts
- Individuals and teams directly supporting young volunteers
- Organisations funding or looking to support youth volunteering

3.1 If you are setting up/designing a youth volunteering programme

Establish alignment with senior stakeholders

There is great power behind demonstrating how young volunteers directly contribute to the strategic interests of the Trust. Working to establish and build senior buy-in from the board, executives and governors has been a critical step for Trusts as they work towards embedding youth volunteering.

Practical tips for securing senior buy-in:

- **Provide clear plans and ambitions early on.** Make sure youth volunteering is on the radar of senior leadership early on in planning a programme by sharing plans and showing the benefits it will bring to the Trust.
- **Find a champion within the senior leadership team.** Someone senior in the Trust who is involved in governance and can act as a sounding board and advocate for youth volunteering. Alternatively, create opportunities for young people to speak directly to senior leadership teams.
- **Understand what motivates senior teams and how to align ambitions/strategy.** In some Trusts, it was necessary to focus on numbers to 'speak to strategy' (this can be kept simple, e.g. numbers of: volunteers, hours, patients benefitting). Other Trusts were interested in the role of youth voice within health settings.
- **Be visible.** Actively build internal relationships. Trusts can take regular photos for hospital social media that promote the value and benefits of youth volunteering. Link up with the Trust's charity, the fundraising/communications/patient experience teams. One Trust started a volunteering award to recognise achievements that volunteers have made and invited the hospital CEO and the local Mayor to the event to raise the profile of youth volunteering within the Trust.

Engage hospital ward staff with young volunteers

It is crucial from the beginning to engage hospital staff with youth volunteering programmes. It helps to create an environment where staff can see and experience the value of young volunteers. Pears #iwill Fund Trusts achieved this with the approaches outlined below.

Practical tips for engaging hospital staff:

- **Including young volunteers in staff inductions** – using this as an opportunity to show the benefits that young volunteers could bring to the Trust.
- **Being clear about young volunteer roles.** For example, posters outlining the tasks that volunteers could do (e.g. 'Top 10 things young volunteers can do on this ward') to act as a reference point for staff and volunteers.
- **Creating roles among ward staff to supervise a young volunteer.** This provided a point of contact and support network for volunteers.
- **Providing opportunities for staff to feed back.** For example, running briefings for ward staff to make sure they were aware of who to contact about volunteering and if they had any concerns. Sending out weekly emails with updates about the volunteer programme helped keep staff informed.
- **Working closely with patient experience teams.** These teams are valuable sources of data (from specific examples to ward statistics) on the benefits youth volunteering brings to patients. One volunteer coordinator used patient experience data to look for references to patient boredom and identified relevant wards on which to discuss volunteering with staff.
- **Promoting positive examples of volunteering on hospital wards.** If staff see how well it can work on other wards, then they are more likely to become involved. Highlighting how youth volunteering has contributed to the effectiveness of hospital teams by reducing burdens facing staff is helpful. A nurse at one Trust shared their positive experience supporting young volunteers. Awareness of this story spread throughout the neighbouring wards and across different teams. This process involves working long term with staff, especially the nurses, ward managers and matrons.

Develop flexible roles for young volunteers

Being mindful of young volunteers' existing commitments and being flexible around term dates and exam schedules has helped Trusts to recruit volunteers. Offering rotating opportunities has also helped Trusts' early recruitment processes.

Chesterfield Royal Hospital developed an 8-12 week rotation scheme where young volunteers moved between the Emergency Department, Neo Natal, Surgical Ward and Elderly Care Ward. Specific roles included: working within the emergency department supporting patients and visitors; helping with refreshments and restocking cubicles; escorting patients around the hospitals and putting information packs together. Volunteers were supported by hospital staff in all these areas.

Volunteers gave positive feedback about the variation and level of staff support they received: *'It is flexible and accommodates school and college commitments'*.

Other flexible roles for youth volunteers across the Network included:

- **'Boredom busters'**. Working in pairs on particular wards and being involved with patients on a particular activity.
- **Mealtime support** in the elderly care or *neurological* wards.
- **Volunteering in the community** with schools and colleges, raising health awareness about a particular health subject. Young people selected the topic for their individual community fundraising.

Build relationships with local allies

Trusts should make use of local networks and think carefully about who the programme is trying to reach and how to make it happen. Pears #iwill Trusts mapped out partnerships within their local communities and invested time establishing relationships with local schools, colleges and community organisations. In the early stages of programme development, this helped with recruitment and generated a regular flow of applications.

Finding 'allies' in schools and community projects is crucial. This includes career advisers, heads of year, or head teachers who can offer the opportunity for hospital volunteering leads to come and talk with students about volunteering. However, getting schools on board and getting around gatekeeping issues can be challenging. Trusts persevered and invested time in building relationships with schools to find the right person to advocate for volunteering.

Other recruitment tips include:

- **Recruitment through the local university.** Promote general awareness about volunteering programmes and opportunities for references and traineeships. For example, attend the freshers' fair. Some Trusts have a pre-apprenticeship taster session, for example, for a Nursing apprenticeship.
- Outside of the formal education environment, **use organisations within the community** (e.g. Scouts, Guides and Duke of Edinburgh Award), as well as local youth clubs, community centres and local volunteer centres/Council for Voluntary Service (CVS).



Photo credit: Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group



3.2 If you directly support young volunteers

Ensuring young volunteers are well looked after and safe is a priority across the Network. Creating a supportive environment is vital for high retention rates and for meaningful volunteering experiences. Trusts recognise that young people's needs vary significantly: *'We need to be adaptable in our approach to support'*. Therefore, support systems need to adapt to respond to this.

Some examples are given below:

- 1. Having a member of the volunteer coordinator team focusing on young volunteers**, ringfencing time and resource, has been important, especially as Trusts have looked to sustain their programmes. Dedicating time in this way has helped teams to establish youth volunteering programmes that are safe and high quality.
- 2. Peer support** from volunteers, mentoring programmes, buddying schemes and mixing 25+ volunteers with young volunteers on volunteer shifts. Youth forums and liaison groups have been developed within Trusts as an opportunity for young volunteers to come together to discuss their experiences and to generate ideas about their roles in the Trust. [Birmingham's YPAG](#) (Young Person's Advisory Group) met on Zoom on a weekly basis during Covid-19 lockdowns.
- 3. Create meaningful, flexible and attractive volunteer roles.** Where possible, link roles to individuals' career or social aspirations. Examples include work on the ward shop trolley; an 8-12 week rotation placement; offering a range of administrative roles outside of healthcare (e.g. front of house – outpatient, flower and retail work). Offering a range of timescales to commit to can also support retention rates: *'We need to offer progressive training from 'responder' roles to ward roles to build confidence. Youth volunteers are rarely ready to go straight onto wards'*. Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Trust developed *'reflective learning logs'* for volunteers' first 8 to 10 shifts to help their team support and provide focus for their young volunteers.

3.3 If you are funding or looking to support youth volunteering

Pears #iwill Fund support has enabled Trusts to dedicate time and resource into setting up, stabilising and growing youth volunteering programmes. Trusts decided how the funding was allocated, and feedback about individual programmes was primarily focused on learning to share with the Network. The Pears funding was directly attributed to helping Trusts to see the benefit of youth volunteering in 81% of the Network Trusts.

This direct investment in Voluntary Services Teams provided a dedicated source of time, energy and commitment on youth volunteering to underpin the success of the Network. These individuals have been opportunistic and resourceful. They have drawn on necessary partners and allies as they have developed new programmes and roles, been adaptable during Covid-19 to redesign volunteer roles, undertake risk assessments and respond to unprecedented challenges; and been dedicated in providing meaningful opportunities for young people.

As well as enabling Trusts to secure a youth volunteer coordinator post and giving the youth volunteering programme strategic prominence, the initial Pears #iwill Fund grants enabled Trusts to make the case for youth volunteering and prove the benefits it can bring. In turn, this has sustained strategic buy-in. This is essential in order to provide high quality volunteering opportunities for young people, as expressed in quotes from members of the voluntary services team:

'Without the funding and a specific role, we would not have been able to give young people the opportunity to volunteer at the hospital.'

'[The funding] meant that we had more capacity to recruit and support a higher number of young volunteers than before the project. It meant that we had more capacity to access other projects that have supported our young volunteers, e.g. supporting them with the National volunteering certificate and other educational opportunities that they may not have had access to otherwise.'

'It gave a strong prominence to youth volunteering as many of our older volunteers were away due to vulnerability [during Covid-19] and youth volunteers were very visible throughout the hospital.'

'Without the programme, we may be unable to provide young people with the additional support that they require, or continue to engage with them and retain them as we are currently doing.'

'We are particularly targeting those young people from the more deprived areas of the city and the funding will allow us to give opportunities to young people, so that we can have a diverse volunteer workforce representative of our local community.'

Rachael Hardcastle Pearce

*Senior Patient Experience and Engagement Manager,
Lead Young Health Champions Volunteering*

The adventure began in 2014, setting up the Young Health Champions volunteering programme has been more rewarding than I ever imagined. Helping young people realise their dreams and potential and being able to become the gatekeeper to their opportunities has been both a privilege and an honour. Not only do we signpost them in the right direction to fulfil their dreams but I feel I'm on that journey with them every step of the way.

Here at Hull University Teaching Hospitals (HUTH), we have grown the Young Health Champions programme from 20 young people back in 2014, to today, where we have inspired and encouraged over a 1000 young volunteers, most of whom were aspiring to achieve a career in health and went onto medical school, university, a full-time post at the Trust or gained an apprenticeship.

We could not have achieved this without the engagement from our staff at HUTH and our senior lead support. This was one of the key principals of getting the programme right and demonstrating that young people can bring so much more to health care than a smile: their energy and enthusiasm is infectious and helps both patients and staff morale.

We are excited to see what the future holds for the Young Health Champions volunteering. We are looking at different pathways for them and continuing our support and engagement with schools and colleges. Young people are our future, invest in them today and see the change tomorrow.

Tif Carter

*Deputy Voluntary Services Manager,
Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust*

For me, it is the legacy of the project which is most empowering, when considering the path it leaves for us to continue on this journey. The opportunities, pilot projects and groundwork put in place over the two years have created subtle but impactful changes in departments and services across the Trust.

We have successfully moved the conversation forward, creating a new culture at Leeds Teaching Hospitals (LTHT) where the idea of young volunteers supporting our patients and services is not an obstacle to be overcome but an opportunity to do things differently, with renewed energy and creativity. By demonstrating the unique skills, abilities and gifts that young volunteers bring to the organisation in support of our patients, we can ensure that roles are created with young people in mind; and that they are accessible and encourage and support young people to thrive whilst volunteering at LTHT. By working with services collaboratively, we can help them to deliver their goals and ambitions whilst also creating an environment for young people to build valuable skills and experience to use in further volunteering and future healthcare careers.

The flexibility shown by the funders during the global pandemic has been invaluable. Their confidence in recognising the skills and experience we have to deliver the best possible outcomes within given limitations ensured that the future of youth volunteering has firm foundations on which to develop. By understanding that each Trust is different, we have been given the space to work with the wider network of Trusts to openly share ideas, trial new ideas and deliver a vision and future that has the support and scope to continue despite the changing landscape of NHS volunteering.

Munya Badze and Caroline McBride

Youth Volunteering Project Manager & Workforce Transformation and OD Programme Manager, NHS Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group

Our approach to developing youth volunteering in the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System began with meeting local Volunteer Service Managers (VSMs) from NHS employers and other health and care provider organisations to better understand current engagement with 16-25 year olds, and the range of volunteering opportunities open to them.

At the same time, we were meeting with local secondary schools, colleges, universities and Department for Work and Pensions partners to identify how volunteering would support youth to develop skills for the world of work and to promote social action.

We have set up a Kent and Medway Youth Volunteering Steering group for our project work, with 25 members comprising senior leaders from a wide range of sectors, including VSMs from health and care providers and young people from the local communities. The Steering Group is already having an impact by supporting:

- Development of a strategy that enables partnership working across education, voluntary sector partners and health and care partners
- The shaping of a youth volunteer journey
- The design of new volunteer programmes and opportunities for 16-25 year olds

The project work being undertaken across the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System is raising the profile of volunteering, and the role of younger people in particular, and developing an understanding among our senior leaders about how volunteers can make a positive difference to individuals accessing our health and care services; how social action can improve population health more generally; and how volunteering contributes to the wider transformation strategy of making Kent and Medway a better place to live, work and learn. It is also supporting the collaboration of key staff and teams to work together differently both within and across organisations.

We are very much at the beginning of our journey and working with Volunteer Leads locally and nationally is invaluable because of the opportunities it brings to share good practice, resources and to design solutions to challenges with others doing similar work. Some of the work we have done so far in Kent and Medway has included, working with Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust (KMPT). We partnered with Link19 (a local college for students with Special Needs) and Canterbury Academy, to plant up to 70 trees in the gardens of the Trust's mental health units. In addition to tree planting, each of the groups of students learnt:

- How tree planting helps with the Trust's sustainability strategy
- How gardening forms part of patient therapy and recovery
- Career pathways in health and care, specifically mental health

We continue to work with KMPT and other Trusts to design and develop a range of new volunteering programmes in partnership with local schools, colleges, higher education institutions and DWP.

Closing statement

The Pears #iwill Fund was always designed to be a time-limited intervention, but hopefully one that would make a lasting and meaningful change to the engagement, involvement and support of young people within NHS volunteering. Reading this report, it is clear to see the significant changes that the Trusts involved have made, and how much of this work is now embedded in their future plans – but this is still only the beginning.

We hope that this report will inspire people, in whatever role they find themselves, to be proactive in seeking opportunities to support and advocate for the culture change required to embed young volunteers across the NHS. However, we are under no illusion as to the challenges and barriers that exist in that endeavour. Despite the recent extraordinary circumstances facing the Trusts partnering with the Pears #iwill Fund, our collective learning from across the project has underlined the determination, tenacity and creativity that exists at all levels to make changes within a system that might sometimes be, or appear to be, resistant. And when the system is already stretched, that effort requires time, energy and resource – both to identify the opportunities and levers that exist, and to act on them.

The role and actions of individuals in making change should never be underestimated. We're delighted that this report highlights that young people, committed staff and dynamic leaders can contribute to the vision of an NHS volunteering service that is accessible to all. However, in order to achieve that, these individuals require support with salaries, operational budgets and, perhaps most importantly, the time and freedom to enable reflection, learning and partnership building.

This report will not be the end of Pears Foundation's commitment. We are pleased and look forward to continuing to work in partnership with NHS England and the many organisations and stakeholders that have made this work possible to date, and together to supporting more incredible young people to engage with the NHS in the years to come.



Sir Trevor Pears CMG

Executive Chair
Pears Foundation

Appendix

Appendix One: IVAR learning partner activity

Activity	Description
<p>Annual learning day</p>	<p>Each year, Pears Foundation and IVAR hosted face-to-face (or online during Covid-19) convenings to bring the full Network together alongside NHS England & NHS Improvement and the #iwill Movement. These workshops were used to: celebrate achievements; explore challenges; collectively shape the learning package for IVAR's support/activity.</p> <p>Trusts and young volunteers presented and shared their experiences with the Network and members of the #iwill campaign. We occasionally extended the invitation to organisations supporting youth volunteering or youth social action, including National Network Youth Forums and NHS Youth Forum, the Duke of Edinburgh Award, and Premier League Charitable Fund.</p> <p>Workshops were a space to connect with peers, plan, share examples to inspire and uplift, and have the support of a cohort of listening ears.</p>
<p>Working groups</p>	<p>Working groups were either regional (bringing together Trusts from similar geographical areas) or focused on a particular theme. For example, in 2019, we ran three working groups on: evaluation and learning; widening participation; sustainability and exit. This strand of learning partner work offered informal space for peer learning and reflection. These groups also developed resources to share with the wider network.</p>
<p>Peer support</p>	<p>We hosted peer support sessions for the Network during Covid-19; informal drop-in style meetings on Zoom or Teams for Trusts to share current experiences, concerns/challenges and hear from others in the Network.</p>
<p>Online forum</p>	<p>We managed a Slack workspace which Trusts used to connect, share informal updates or quick questions, share resources, discuss emerging practice issues (such as widening participation, embedding evaluation). This online space has been incorporated into FutureNHS.</p>
<p>Online resource hub</p>	<p>We worked to create practical resources by drawing out themes, practical tips, writing briefings and blogs, creating templates. These can be found here and the page also signposts to other initiatives.</p>
<p>Informal advice, signposting and connecting</p>	<p>Ad hoc support to volunteer coordinators, including work on specific questions (e.g. how to gather feedback from young people), signposting to resources and learning (e.g. job descriptions or policies shared by other Trusts), connecting them to volunteer staff in other NHS Trusts.</p>

Data gathering and sharing	IVAR gathered data via case studies, annual surveys, reviewing monitoring reports, and facilitating a panel of young researchers to develop their own stories about their volunteering experiences.
Strategic stakeholder meetings	Strategic meetings between Pears Foundation, NHS England & NHS Improvement and IVAR. These were regular opportunities to share updates and learning, and to connect to other initiatives across health and youth volunteering.

Appendix Two: Further resources and useful reading

- [NHSE's Recruiting and Managing Volunteers a practical guide](#)
- Helping in Hospitals [report](#) and [evaluation](#)
- [NCVO Impact Assessment Toolkit](#)
- [Volunteering Matters Toolkit](#)
- [Volunteering Matters Breaking Barrier Report](#)
- [#iwill Fund Learning Hub, Centre for Youth Impact](#)
- The King's Fund: [Our work on volunteering in health and social care](#)