

Volunteer Development - Update to Board

October 2021

Overview

Volunteers play a vital role in supporting us to talk to people in Cornwall about their experiences of using health and social care services but clearly, during the pandemic, the way in which volunteers were able to be involved changed drastically. Regardless of this, we have undertaken a comprehensive review of all of our policies and procedures relating to supporting volunteers and are constantly looking for ways to involve volunteers in our ongoing projects and work. As we look to restart face to face engagement and embark on a number of engagement and research activities, there will once again be a range of options for existing and new volunteers to be involved.

This brief report seeks to update the Board on the current state of play with regards to volunteer activity, and also update on the volunteer development action plan that incorporates feedback from the 2021 volunteer survey sent from the Operational Development Action Group (ODAG).

Volunteer activity

During the pandemic there were a number of digital/remote engagement activities for existing volunteers to be involved with, but it was clear that this was only of interest to a smaller number of volunteers who had all been recruited for in-person engagement. Regardless of whether volunteers were actively involved, regular contact was maintained via email/phone communication and the option to join regular online Zoom catch-ups. We also recognised volunteer support on key days as well as in ongoing communication, had a volunteer week gathering and Christmas celebration (virtually), sending a handwritten thank you card and small gift. A return to face-to-face volunteer catch-up meetings was attempted in September but due to a number of factors, the decision was taken to postpone this until mid-October.

During the pandemic, some volunteers took part in activities including:



- Telephone ‘have your say’ conversations with patients/service users
- GP website review
- Mental Health project telephone interviews
- Supporting updating GP contact information
- Ageing well interviews
- Putting up posters (MH survey) and sharing leaflets
- Contributing to HWE / external workshops/ requests e.g participating in the Digital NHS Services Project - A new partnership project with Healthwatch England, National Voices and Traverse
- A number of volunteers continued to feed in concerns they were hearing in their respective communities and share updates
- Social care rating reviews

Volunteer support

A comprehensive review of volunteer relating policies and procedures has been conducted that includes:

- Updating the volunteer section on the HC website
- Standardising all volunteer role descriptions and ensuring they are more ‘user-friendly’
- Reviewing all volunteer recruitment related paperwork to ensure consistency and a standardised approach to recruitment and induction
- Updating the Volunteer Handbook
- Drafting an overarching Volunteer Policy based on Healthwatch England’s best practice example, that includes Equality and Diversity
- Evaluating the training hub license obtained per individual volunteer from Cornwall Council to ensure relevance and value for money (licences cost £25 per person per year)

Volunteer Surveys

Two volunteer surveys have been conducted during 2021 - a repeat of the ODAG-led standard survey and an operational survey carried out by the Volunteer Development Officer.



ODAG volunteer survey - a repeat of the 2018 Volunteer Survey was conducted in July 2021, the design and content of which was intended to use a series of questions that echo the standards within Investors in Volunteers. It contains sections that seek to understand: views about their volunteering role; the support that they receive in undertaking it; the training they receive; and the effectiveness of leadership and communication within Healthwatch Cornwall. Only 4 responses were received which were captured as 'average scores' and presented in a table with the 2018 survey average scores presented for comparison - although it is acknowledged that a comparison is not entirely valid due to the very low sample size. However, despite the low sample size, ODAG would still need to see an action plan based on results and this is presented as Appendix 1 to this report. The results of the survey and the action plan will be discussed at the next HCAF on 20 October so an update to ODAG will be presented at its next meeting, with a subsequent update coming to the Board.

In February 2021 an open text feedback form was shared with volunteers to give them an opportunity to detail their feedback of volunteering experience in 2020.

Giving volunteers the opportunity to share their thoughts and explain their feedback is vital to provide us with actionable, high-level view on the feelings and the comments of our volunteers. Paying attention to open-ended feedback is crucial if we want a clear representation of our volunteer's experience of supporting our work.

The following questions were asked as prompts

- "HCAFs- have morphed into bi-monthly zoom catch ups. Do you like these, are they frequent enough, too often? Some of you said they are not your cup of tea, how would you like to keep connected with us and other volunteers? e.g., WhatsApp group, "walking / outdoor meeting" (when restrictions and weather allows) ?
- "Quarterly newsletters - do you read these, if not why? If you do read them, is the content of interest? Is the format of - HWC news, project updates, wider Healthwatch network info, and sector info of interest to you? Is there something else you'd like to be included?
- "Ad hoc information sharing such as sector information, reports via email. Do you find these of interest? Are there too many emails? Not enough sector info shared? Particular areas you'd like more info on?
- "Ad hoc micro volunteering opportunities -such as GP website review project, are you interested in "desk based" micro-opportunities?



- “Would you be comfortable/ interested in getting involved with different types of engagement, vlogs, blogs, a day in the life write up? Please share ideas
- “Would you be comfortable/ interested in getting involved with/ co-facilitating online engagement sessions such a Share & Listen or Facebook Live on a particular theme or service? Please share ideas
- “Interests - in the absence of your normal community engagement volunteering opportunities do you have other health related interests we could utilise or link into our work?
- “Many of you are involved in other groups, volunteering roles and well connected within your communities. Are there opportunities where we as Healthwatch could create links virtually with other organisations in your communities to encourage people to feedback on health and social care experiences.
- “Do you have any other ideas or suggestions for ways we can support you in to volunteer with Healthwatch?”
- “Any other feedback you’d like to share with us?”

Volunteer feedback and ideas were then incorporated it into the refreshed Volunteer Development Plan 2021-22. Feedback will also be used to aid discussion and planning at the next HCAF

Next steps

Internal discussions have taken place with staff to discuss where there might be future demand for volunteers to be involved in activity so that we can assess the need to re-engage existing volunteers and also recruit new volunteers. This will be especially relevant for the Maternity Voices Partnership and Planning for Pregnancy and Parenthood Projects where some volunteers initially recruited are now no longer available due to maternity leave ending, etc and where face to face engagement is likely to happen sooner. We will want to particularly focus on ways to encourage a wider range of people to volunteer with us as we focus on our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Work is also underway to ensure that we accurately capture volunteer activity - to assess in terms of demand across the organisation, to monitor volunteer activity so as to ensure support is in place, to ensure that we capture the number of volunteer



hours and to focus on being able to demonstrate the impact of including volunteers in our work.

The return of face-to-face engagement is both exciting and challenging as we need to ensure that our volunteers are adequately supported and protected, being fully aware of current legislation/guidance and that up-to-date risk assessments are completed.

We will be producing a promotional video with both Maternity Voices Partnership/ Planning for Pregnancy and Parenthood and Healthwatch Cornwall volunteers.

We are also reviewing our DBS arrangements to check that we are following best practice with regards to which roles need to have a DBS check, at what level, and when to repeat the checks.

Anne Oliver will be giving a presentation to the volunteers at the next HCAF meeting of the Healthwatch England Quality Framework that we are beginning to focus on, to see if volunteers would be interested in being involved in this evaluation.

We will also maintain contact with the wider local Healthwatch network to gain knowledge and insight from colleagues to gain new ideas and evaluate our approach as we move forward into the next stage of the pandemic.

Volunteer Sandy - at Duchy College Freshers Fayre with Sarah Jones and Helen Hambly



Appendix 1

ODAG Volunteer Survey Action Plan

Response	Action
<p>Scores within the ‘About you’ section broadly echoed the previous survey results for enjoyment of role, role meeting expectation, responsibility for role, freedom to resolve problems.</p> <p>There was a slight dip in volunteers being given appropriate feedback.</p> <p>There was an improvement in ‘feeling part of a team’ so this was reassuring to see.</p>	<p>Ensure any staff working with volunteers are aware that they need to give appropriate feedback following volunteer involvement. During 121 with volunteer the Volunteer Development Officer (VDO) will check that this is happening.</p> <p>Continue to regularly update volunteers via Volunteer newsletter, HCAF and other means of updating as appropriate.</p>
<p>In the ‘Your role’ section there were improvements to the ratings about being encouraged to come up with new ideas and having the right tools. There were roughly equivalent rating scores for staff involving volunteers in discussions about outcomes, being clear on objectives, expectations of the role, and the chance to discuss their contribution and development needs.</p>	<p>Ensure that once activity increases that all staff involving volunteers in their work are aware of the need to involve volunteers at the earliest opportunity in discussing the intended outcomes, being clear on objectives of the work.</p> <p>The VDO will ensure that volunteers are clear what is expected and is offered the continual opportunity to discuss their contribution and development needs - both upon recruitment and induction, and at regular intervals thereafter.</p>
<p>High scores were once again received for the section on ‘the Organisation’ in terms of people in the organisation speaking in a respectful manner and feeling safe to speak up and challenge.</p>	<p>No action needed</p>



<p>Ratings were either similar or improved within the questions relating to 'Support and Training' especially in terms of feeling able to ask for training and support, receiving information and support, supporting with development needs, staff being available if support/direction needed and receiving regular support discussions.</p> <p>Not surprising but a lower score was received regarding having opportunities to learn and grow over last 12 months.</p>	<p>Ensure support and training is a key focus for all existing and new volunteers, that all volunteers are aware of existing and new training and development opportunities and that all volunteers have a regular support discussion with either the VDO or their key named staff member.</p> <p>Develop a system where all support discussions/sessions are logged, especially any actions needing to be taken as a result.</p>
<p>All scores relating to 'communication' were improved.</p>	<p>Ensure all forms of communication are maintained and developed so that volunteers are kept fully informed as to HC related activity, especially where positive outcomes are achieved.</p>
<p>High ratings were maintained within the 'Volunteers and the Staff Team' section</p>	<p>VDO to ensure that all staff working with volunteers are giving regular feedback about their contribution and how much it is valued by the organisation.</p>
<p>General</p>	<p>Ensure that volunteers are kept informed regarding the various updates to volunteer related policies and improvements.</p>
<p>Free text comments - only a small number of comments were received but related to it being a difficult year to volunteer but with hope that 'normal service' will resume</p>	<p>There is an associated paper going to the Board that provides an interim update with regards to engagement plans so the Volunteer Development Officer, Engagement and Project team officers will all ensure that volunteer involvement is considered in all aspects of planning and delivery.</p>

