

Thank you

A TIME TO SAY
THANKS

Find out more

VOLUNTEERS' WEEK

1-7
JUNE

healthwatch
Brighton and Hove

Volunteers' Week is an annual celebration of the contribution people make across the UK through volunteering. Healthwatch Brighton and Hove wanted to use this opportunity to say a massive thank you to our wonderful volunteers and to recognise the fantastic contribution they make to our organisation.

Most people don't realise that Healthwatch Brighton and Hove is a small team of just five members of staff, and that we are supported wonderfully by the YMCA in delivering our youth strand. Our volunteers are the backbone to our organisations undertaking surveys, calls, research, sharing information, and taking part in virtual meetings. Our volunteers, which includes our Board of Directors and the YMCA Right Here group, help us achieve everything that we do.

Over the last year Healthwatch has continued to attract new volunteers with more than 90 people expressing an interest in joining us. Our local Universities also approached us again this year and we welcomed six health and social care student volunteers to our team. At any one time up to 64 people have actively worked on projects this year which is the largest volume of volunteers we have ever had, and we remain overwhelmed by people's dedication and commitment. In addition, this year we welcomed two new volunteer Board Members to our team bringing with them a wealth of experience and talent.

Over the last year, COVID-19 has dominated the agenda and many Healthwatch projects that volunteers normally supported us with were suspended. We flexed our usual activities and switched to online and telephone work. Our volunteers have played a crucial role in delivering our highly successful Hospital Discharge Project helping it to achieve national recognition, and they have assisted the NHS by answering COVID-19 vaccine queries from members of the public, freeing up NHS to focus on the delivery of the vaccine programme.

With our volunteer's help, skills, and enthusiasm, we continue to make a positive difference to health and social care services in the city. In 2020-21 our volunteers contributed thousands of hours of their time which is truly AMAZING, and we cannot say thank you enough.

In this briefing, Fran McCabe, Chair of the Healthwatch Board, says 'thank you' to all our volunteers. We also asked some of our volunteers to tell us why they had chosen to support Healthwatch, and what they felt they had got out of volunteering for us. Lastly, we asked people from local services to explain the positive impact that our volunteers have made. We hope you enjoy reading these testimonies.

If you have every thought of volunteering for Healthwatch then do take a minute to look at the range of opportunities, we have on our [website](#).

Thank you



A message from Fran McCabe Healthwatch Brighton and Hove Chair



In Volunteers Week 2021, I would like to acknowledge and celebrate the work of Healthwatch volunteers, not just for the week, but for the years you have loyally contributed to Healthwatch work. We could not fulfil our role without you.

When COVID-19 struck and we were locked down, I think we all felt *"what are we going to do now?"*. A sense of helplessness kicked in - but that lasted a couple of weeks and people found that they had lots to offer and could help out in the crisis. It is a tribute to volunteers that despite COVID we have received more help from our local communities than ever before. In addition to 4 Young Healthwatch volunteers and 11 volunteer Board members, over 50 members of the public have given their time and expertise and joined in our work.

Our volunteers have been the backbone of the hospital discharge project, contacting over 1,500 people who have been recently discharged from hospital. This has been complex work, but not only have our volunteers provided genuine help to vulnerable people, the calls have also given us valuable feedback which has facilitated talks with health and social care agencies about the support people need. This work has also helped us plan our work priorities for the coming year.

Volunteers also stepped up at very short notice to assist the Sussex Vaccine Helpline answering over 600 people's questions between February and March. The vaccine roll out has been truly amazing, but the regular changes and updates have kept a dedicated team of volunteers busy. Our volunteers have helped free up valuable NHS staff time allowing them to focus on other important matters.

Through our volunteers we have also gathered crucial intelligence on dental services which has empowered us to act and to challenge those in charge to improve the current offer.

There are so many ways in which our volunteers continue to help Healthwatch, and even those volunteers who have been prevented from working on new projects due to COVID-19 restrictions have continued to help us by reviewing draft reports and surveys, promoting our work, attending virtual meetings on our behalf, and commenting on patient literature produced by our local hospitals. Young Healthwatch volunteers have also delivered an impressive range of work during lockdown ensuring that the voices of younger people in our city have been heard (you can read more about their work later on).

We at Healthwatch can never thank you - our volunteers - enough for giving your time and your expertise. Maybe next year when we can put some of this awful COVID experience behind us, we can have a proper celebration of your work. In the meantime, thank you.

Fran McCabe, Chair, Healthwatch Brighton and Hove

Thank you

Feedback from local services

"We are grateful for the help and support of the Healthwatch volunteers, who give their time to help continually improve health and care services. We would like to offer particular thanks for all those who have volunteered over the past year; it has been a difficult year for most people, and for people to continue to give their time freely to Healthwatch, and to the wider health and care system, has been just amazing. A most sincere thank you to you all"

***Jane Lodge, Associate Director of Public Involvement
Sussex NHS Commissioners***

"The Carers Patient Information Group volunteers have been so helpful creating the patient information leaflets for the Trust - prompt, efficient, considered and conscientious. Thank you so much for all the time and energy that you have spent reading through drafts and commenting, I (and indeed the whole Trust) am so grateful for your hard work. It makes such a difference to what we do. Thank you!!

***Cecilia Bethencourt-Dunning, Patient Information Specialist Librarian
University Hospitals Foundation NHS Trust***

"I would like to commend your volunteer Chris Jennings who has been to several of our Local dental Committee meeting for his true devotion in representing and helping your local residents in addressing their concerns with the provision of dental care services. Chris joined our meeting pre Covid and was very clear in mentioning the concerns of your local residents and the surveys your organisation was undertaking. However, during the Pandemic and up to the present moment, Chris has been extremely helpful in explaining the concerns of your residents, but he really understood and appreciated the restrictions and pressures the dental services were under both by the Government guidance and scientific protocol. Chris was able to understand our explanations and frustration in trying to provide dental services for all patients in pain. Finally, our committee has valued the honest and clear input from Chris, but we also truly appreciated his ability to feedback our concerns to your organisation in an appropriate and concise manner."

Nish Suchak, East Sussex Local Dental Committee

Thank you

"Thank-you for all the support you have given to our patients who have been discharged from the Acute Trust. You have ensured they are kept safe at home, preventing readmission and sign posting to services for some of our vulnerable patients. The link that you provide between the acute and the patients; answering any concerns the patient may have, has been comforting and supportive. Thank-you for all the work you do, for the patients and the Hospital."

***Pamela Heafield, Transformational Discharge Lead Nurse
University Hospitals Foundation NHS Trust***

"I have worked closely with the Healthwatch team and their volunteers who have been flexible in response to the needs of the new Hospital Discharge well-being service. The volunteers really care about the people they are supporting and always want to go the extra mile to ensure their needs are met. They meet regularly and are open to developing new ways of working and have come up with their own ideas to help improve the service delivery. They continually show their professionalism, often managing difficult conversations when they phone people who have left hospital. This service has made a marked difference to people's experiences after leaving hospital, providing a safety net and a friendly voice at the end of the phone in what has been a particularly challenging year"

***Jess Harper, Commissioning & Performance Manager – Health & Adult Social Care
Brighton and Hove City Council***

"I just wanted to drop you a note to say a huge thank you not just for the help, but also for the patience and warm courtesy you've shown in trying to set up my elderly parents' second vaccination. This has now come through for next Friday - hooray! I was especially grateful for your understanding and willingness to follow things through. Holly and Carol and yourself deserve especial praise. Thank you."

"I wanted to say a huge **THANK-YOU** to you and Fran O'Neill. Fran went above & beyond to help us. The volunteers are doing a great & honourable job there."

Members of the public who were supported by Healthwatch volunteers

Thank you

Meet some of our volunteers.



Conor Sheehan, volunteer

Since I retired from full-time work as a university academic, it has been really important to continue feeling involved with people on a community level. Becoming a Healthwatch volunteer on the hospital discharge project ago this year has allowed me to do just that. My role involves contacting patients by phone after they have left hospital to check how they are feeling and whether they need any practical or psychological support from Brighton based community organisations.

Some people might need help with food supplies or medicine delivery or wish to relay a concern back to the hospital care team. Patients are sometimes just glad of the chance for a quick reassuring chat, and they often tell me that it means a lot to know that somebody is thinking about them and their recovery.

In certain instances, people can be struggling with anxiety or other mental health issues some of which have been exacerbated by COVID-19 concerns. It is important that I am able to refer them to appropriate agencies and support groups that can help. Knowing that you may have helped to make someone's life a little easier or better, even in a very small way, is a great feeling.

There is always strong support for us as volunteers from the Healthwatch central team and this manifests itself in the training we receive. Our regular 'Zoom' volunteer meetings are always informative in addition to providing the opportunity for a bit of a laugh together which I think is essential in these challenging times! It has been great to be able to give back a little to those who need a bit of help and it is certainly true that doing so has real rewards.



Fran O'Neil, volunteer

I started volunteering with Healthwatch in November 2020. I was in the process of retiring from the NHS on ill health grounds and so was still employed and being paid by them. It did not feel right, and as we were in the middle of a pandemic with very little going on generally, I looked for voluntary work.

Healthwatch offered the opportunity for me to use some of my skills doing wellbeing calls for people who have recently been discharged from hospital; sort of like a safety net to ensure that support and services are in place for patients when they went home. It is genuinely very rewarding work and I enjoy it immensely. I have also had the opportunity to work on the Sussex Covid Vaccination helpline and now pick up the answer phone messages that Healthwatch receives. Interesting and challenging in equal measures -in a good way!

Thank you

What is really good about the organisation is how well supported you are. There are regular team meetings and catch ups where people from various organisations in the community join us to share knowledge about what they do, regular communication from the project leaders with updates on what is going on in the community and someone is always at the end of an email or phone if you need help or advise. And most importantly, they are a really nice bunch 😊. They even managed to organise an online Christmas party!! Let's hope we can all get together for a proper one this year!



Alistair Hignell - volunteer Board member

My grandmother was one of the first doctors ever employed by the NHS. My father and brother were also GPs. At least a dozen friends and family work in medicine. You could say the NHS is in my DNA, especially as I have two chronic conditions and a wheelchair and spent the best part of a week in Intensive Care in 2020.

I have personal experience of what the critics would call the “learned helplessness of the NHS” and I have personal experience of the heroic and selfless qualities highlighted in the COVID-19 pandemic. I know which I prefer, and I want to do my bit to ensure that an organization that is still the envy of the world should be recognised for the right reasons. Change is all around. Change is inevitable and change can be painful. I believe that bodies like Healthwatch can mitigate the pain, convince the die-hards and smooth the transition from learned helplessness to informed care.



Khalid Ali, volunteer Board member and Senior lecturer in Geriatrics in Brighton and Sussex Medical School

Joining the board of directors at Brighton and Hove Healthwatch team since November 2020 has been a rewarding experience. Addressing the health and social care challenges of Brighton and Hove citizens in consultation with an experienced team of volunteers was an eye opener. Priority issues such as COVID vaccination, quality of care in hospitals and care homes, virtual consultations and online booking challenges in primary care were few of the problems that were discussed in a transparent environment in our meetings. The genuine passion and desire to influence a positive change that drives the group members is reflected in the quality of reports and recommendations made by the team. It is a great honour to be part of this dedicated and dynamic group.

Thank you



Hadi Kebbeh, student placement volunteer

As final year student, a placement at Healthwatch Brighton provided me with a better understanding of health promotion and advocacy within the community.

I had special interest in mental health and wellbeing and the organisation was so supportive in finding me suitable roles that were engaging within this field. Not only that, but I was able to venture out in other areas as well. For instance, I took part in the recruitment of participants from Black and Minority Ethnic for a COVID-19 vaccine hesitation research. This was especially useful because I received some meaningful feedback from this group of people. Being able to receive feedback is a useful form of data as it can be used to inform service delivery within communities.

Additionally, the experience has helped me to develop skills that can be used to confidently deliver a culturally inclusive community practice.

Understanding and championing for the needs of the population is key to Public Health and with the experienced gained from Healthwatch, not only was I able to link that to theory within the classroom but I believe it will be beneficial within my future career.

My placement at Healthwatch provided a positive learning experience which was motivational and supported my academic development. But most of all, the openness with which I was accepted into the role has boosted my confidence.



Leah Ashley, volunteer

I became involved with the Healthwatch Hospital Discharge Wellbeing Scheme during the lockdown last summer. I have been volunteering at BSUH for a number of years and saw this opportunity to volunteer for Healthwatch advertised on our newsletter, where we phone patients to check on their wellbeing following discharge from our hospitals. My first thought was this is a great extension of care within our healthcare system. It didn't take long for me to feel natural about making these calls and I started to enjoy the process. It is particularly rewarding when you feel you have been able to hear the patients' experience, recommendations and even complaints. I have learned a lot during the past year with Healthwatch. There are no doubts about some challenging situations but the whole team at Healthwatch is very supportive and I never once felt left alone to deal with a difficult situation. It certainly feels like a big family working together to achieve the same goals, and it is very gratifying to know that our work has been helpful and useful to the community, as well as being recognised as a benchmark of the best practices within our social care system.

Thank you

Young Healthwatch volunteers



We are a group of YMCA Right Here volunteers who are passionate about mental health and wellbeing and want to make a difference in the life of young people in our community. This year we have been involved in a few projects with Young Healthwatch.

Last summer, we were involved in creating a [survey consultation](#) for young people living in the Sussex area around their experiences of online health and social care services. We were involved in creating survey questions and making sure they were accessible to young people. We also looked at the data collected, coming up with themes and youth recommendations to make online services more accessible to young people.

Last autumn, we were involved in creating lots of media content, including videos, social media posts as well as stories around COVID-19. These included youth-friendly [information about mask wearing](#) and [mask types](#), [hand washing](#), the [effect of COVID-19 on the environment](#), the [COVID vaccine](#), a Youtube series on [COVID myth busting](#), [Sex and Relationships at the time of COVID](#) and much more - we had a lot of fun producing this content! All the content we created was uploaded on the [Brighton and Hove Healthwatch website](#) as well as both [Right Here](#) and [Healthwatch](#) Instagram pages. We had a lot of engagement on Instagram and our followers said they found the information very useful, so our work has paid off.

This winter, we were involved in another digital research consultation exploring the barriers faced by young people when accessing/trying to access mental health online appointments, including phone and video call appointments. We participated in a focus group sharing our views and barriers experienced and came up with solutions to break these barriers and make the whole online experience more pleasant for young people like us. After the consultation, we worked closely with Lucy and Elena (Right Here engagement coordinators) to create a digital guide to help young people get ready for online mental health appointments; including tips and strategies to use weeks, days, and minutes before an appointment. We came up with the content, the lay out and style and we are excited for the guide to be published and shared with lots of services and youth groups - we hope young people will find it useful!

Young Healthwatch & YMCA Right Here volunteers Jordan, Nathaniel, Jacobina and Josh.