



## COMPANION VOLUNTEERS IN END OF LIFE CARE: HYWEL DDA UHB STORY

'Covid hit as just as we embarked on the project, so we took the decision early on to 'go virtual'. We involved some existing 'in house' volunteers and also a cohort from Hahav (Hospital at Home, Aberystwyth). Many were in their 70 and 80s and it was a massive challenge to get everyone up to speed with digital technology and through the corporate induction training.

Those over 70 were officially categorised as 'Covid vulnerable'; it was a further challenge to get permission for this age group to volunteer – even volunteering remotely from home. We submitted a paper to make the case but this caused a 7 – 8 week delay and hindered progress somewhat. However it did buy us time to get volunteers through their training and ready. There was some drop out during period, by volunteers who felt this was not what they had signed up to. All were given an ipad, set up so that it was a one click process to connect with patients, but even so, some struggled with volunteering from home. Overall 3 volunteers dropped out and 9 remained active.

There is a massive need for a 'hand in hand' service such as ours, due to an ageing demography, the rurality of the area and so on. Some patients weren't well enough or wanted face to face contact rather than online

communication - there was a perception problem that a virtual conversation would not be adequate.

One lovely encounter did take place between a volunteer and a patient who both had a passion for donkeys. They bonded immediately, with the patient saying afterwards that 'it lightened my day'.

In August, at last we had the go ahead from the Bronze group to resume face to face service and the service is gaining momentum, preparing relevant paperwork and doing risk assessments – we have yet to bring volunteers back face to face.

The experience of the project has brought so much wider learning. It has developed our working relationship with Hahav and other organisations, and has strengthened existing relationships too'.

Nia Gibbon, Volunteering for Health Officer

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