

**We can unlock the
power of volunteering**

helplu

helpforce

Dr Fiona Liddell, Helpforce Cymru Manager at Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), argues the need for volunteers to be part of the solution to our crisis in health and social care, and suggests how we can begin to unlock the power of volunteering.

The pandemic has certainly raised the profile and the possibilities of volunteering.

How would we have cared for those who were vulnerable or shielding at home, or run our mass vaccination centres, without the thousands of willing volunteers who got involved, through their Health Board, voluntary organisation or local community group? Volunteering, it seems, was both essential to our health and care services and a critical element of community resilience.

The Framework for Volunteering in Health and Social Care was developed to maintain the momentum gained during the pandemic. 'Our goal', said Eluned Morgan, Minister for Health and Social Services in launching the Framework, 'is to assert volunteering as an integral and valuable aspect of the health and social care workforce of the future, coherently integrating volunteering into the fabric of our health and social care services'.

We talk now about 'Covid recovery', but we hear surprisingly little about how volunteers might be part of the 'fabric of our health and social care services', going forward. And we are still, by all accounts, experiencing a crisis in health and social care, with pressures on staff and systems which show little sign of abating in the near future.

Can volunteers be part of the solution?

Helpforce' vision is for a wholesale scaling up of intelligently designed volunteering, underpinned by a robust and resourced volunteering infrastructure. This has to be about more than committing short term funding for ad hoc volunteering projects, however good and worthwhile they may individually be.

In its current campaign 'Back to Health – unlocking the power of volunteering across health and care' Helpforce has committed to working with partners who share this ambition, supporting them to design volunteer roles, gather impact evidence and develop a business case to influence leadership support for further investment. This offer is open to partners also in Wales and is free of charge.

If volunteering can, as we believe, be part of the solution, we need to take a broad approach, recognising the ecosystem which is unique to different regions and which

involves a variety of players. Volunteering needs to be not only on the agenda of health and care delivery organisations but also on the multi sector planning agenda.

Partnerships between organisations can often provide the solutions: the resources, the expertise, the flexible but joined up pathways of care, which are beyond the reach of any single organisation – whether NHS, local government or voluntary sector.

A Framework for volunteering in health and social care

The Framework encourages fresh thinking and a broad look at where and how volunteers can play a vital role in the delivery or enhancement of health and social care services.

It addresses six key questions around volunteering – including who we should work with and how we measure the impact of volunteering. Information is tailored to four distinct audiences: planners and commissioners, delivery organisations, infrastructure bodies and community groups.

Readers can follow a pathway which considers each of the questions for just one of these audiences, or can explore a key question from different standpoints. There are links to resources, research reports and case studies.

A self assessment exercise is included (there is one for each of the four target audiences) to enable organisations to identify actions that they can take to sustain and elevate the status of volunteering.

Using the self assessment is a good way to recognise and celebrate what we are already doing well and to identify opportunities to accelerate, diversify or improve the impact of volunteering - so that volunteers can play their part more effectively in the in health and social care of our communities.

Contact Fiona by email fliddell@wcva.cymru if you would like to discuss the use of Framework or if you are interested in accessing the support services offered by Helpforce.

Helpforce Cymru is working with Third Sector Support Wales (WCVA and 19 CVCs), Welsh Government and other partners to develop the potential of volunteering to support health and social care services in Wales.

Visit the [Helpforce Cymru webpage](#), or [sign up here](#) to receive email updates (choose the option 'health and care volunteering').