

Engaging staff and volunteers in a hospital's sustainability work

The Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (RBCH) is a leader in sustainability and has won awards in waste, travel, behaviour change and green spaces. A key aspect of the work is engaging staff through Green Impact. The programme provides a framework of actions to help people understand sustainability and social responsibility and take steps to change behaviours.

The Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust and NUS

OD and Behaviour Change

What was the issue being addressed?

Improving environmental, social and economic sustainability within a hospital can be challenging. The priority, rightly, is patient care, but sole focus on this can result in problems elsewhere. For example, leaving computers and other appliances switched on for quick, easy access can waste huge amounts of energy – money that the hospital cannot spend on patient care. These types of sustainability issues can be due to a lack of knowledge about the impacts that small actions can make, belief that the problem is too large to be solved or no one taking the lead on changing things. The [Royal Voluntary Service](#) (RVS) has 14,000 volunteers working in hospitals across England, Scotland and Wales, providing vital support to patients, staff and visitors every single day of the year.



Engaging volunteers like these in everyday sustainability issues and providing simple training enabled them to play a large part in helping the trust save energy, carbon and money.

What action was taken to overcome the issue?

RBCH and NUS created and delivered an hour-long training workshop for volunteers at the Royal Bournemouth Hospital at a regular volunteers' coffee morning. It covered:

- What sustainability and sustainable healthcare are
- Green Impact scheme
- How volunteers can help
- Training in light-touch auditing

By framing the problem appropriately and showing easy solutions, the Trust were able to engage the volunteers in the topic. After the training all attendees received a simple audit form to keep track of ideas as they went around the hospital, looking at energy usage, waste and recycling, water, procurement, health and wellbeing and general awareness.

What was the impact?

Simply telling volunteers that they can switch off lights or close doors in empty rooms empowered them to take ownership of sustainability actions within their area, and they were very keen to help make cost savings for the hospital. They also had other brilliant ideas, some of which have already been implemented successfully, including a regularly updated Green Impact notice board in the volunteers' locker room, a swap box for books, and collections of used batteries, stamps and milk bottle tops for recycling or charity.

The trust is investigating several other suggestions, including meat-free Mondays, stocking soy milk and decaf or alternative teas, improving recycling in wards, light-intensity controlled lighting in corridors and occupancy sensor lights. The trust is setting up a formalised volunteer audit with approval of the sisters in charge of wards.

Lessons learned / success factors?

Hospital volunteers are very motivated to help however they can, and it is important the trust helped them to. They are very well-placed to identify areas of good and bad practice and suggest improvements. They may not feel able to make changes themselves, so it is important to give them someone to suggest ideas to. The training was a brilliant opportunity to engage their enthusiasm about the work and field.

"I think this was a fantastic opportunity engaging with the volunteers regarding sustainability and embedding the green impact scheme across the Trust. The volunteers have a valuable insight into all areas across the hospital and can really help us identify and embed changes towards helping us become a more sustainable organisation."

Laura Dale, Sustainability Manager

A big challenge was getting across a lot of information in a short amount of time – it is important to help people find out more if they want to. Continuous engagement is vital. The difficulty here is using communication methods other than email!

Scaling up

With 14,000 volunteers working in hospitals from the RVS alone, the potential impacts could be huge. It greatly increases the knowledge and resources available to sustainability teams within hospitals, helping them to tailor their work effectively.

Over 400 organisations have used the Green Impacts model, including NHS Trusts, GP surgeries and dental practices, developing and delivering their own bespoke programmes.

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