**What is Junior Volunteering?**

Hospital-based volunteering programmes traditionally focus on providing benefits to patients and staff. Social action is known to provide a ‘double benefit’: to individuals and communities. Uniquely designed to benefit local communities, the Junior Volunteering programme developed at Birmingham Women’s and Children’s NHS Foundation Trust takes in all three, providing a ‘triple benefit’: to individuals, communities, and patients, families and staff.

Launched in response to the #iwill campaign, the programme’s long-term aims are to raise participants’ aspirations, encouraging greater diversity and local representation in the applicant pool for NHS jobs; to educate communities about healthcare issues; and to engender a lifetime commitment to social action.

**Programme structure**

Volunteering in small fully-supervised groups, Junior Volunteers (JVs) spend between half a day and two days on-site becoming familiar with the range of jobs in an NHS Trust, learning about a specific area of healthcare and addressing a challenge in that area. There are five guiding principles to the Junior Volunteer experience:

* **Introduce** - JVs are introduced to a hospital setting and the range of healthcare careers within
* **Learn** - JVs learn about a specific area in greater detail and a particular challenge in that area.
* **Consolidate** - JVs consolidate their knowledge by discussing how the key health issues they have learned about affect their own long-term health and well-being, and that of their communities.
* **Give** - JVs use their creativity and energy to take on a task addressing the challenge they have been set. This could be designing a publicity campaign, planning a fundraiser, creating a resource, or putting together a presentation to take back to their school or community.
* **Share** - JVs are asked to share what they have learned and experienced as widely as possible, through their school, personal and/or community channels.

Each project needs a Staff Lead. The Junior Volunteer programme works to a principle of shared responsibility, whereby DBS-checked Group Leaders and Accompanying Adults (if any) stay with JVs during their experience. The Trust provides a Lead Person In Charge (either the Staff Lead for the project or a member of the Volunteering Team) and normally assigns a volunteer to stay with the group.

Guidance issued to Group Leaders and Staff Leads lets them know what is expected of each role, and guidance to parents/guardians reassures them that young volunteers will be kept safe during their experience. All Junior Volunteers also sign a Code of Conduct, which sets out the expected standards of behaviour. Before they begin their volunteer experience, JVs receive a bespoke induction, introducing the Trust itself and covering general rules of Health and Safety, Infection Control, Fire Safety, Confidentiality etc in a straightforward way, including group exercises to consolidate understanding.

At the end of their volunteer experience, all Junior Volunteers should receive a Certificate of Completion, and invitations to join existing volunteer programmes (if/when they are old enough), and to investigate work experience opportunities, or to consider other age-appropriate opportunities.

**How can Junior Volunteering work for my Trust?**

Junior Volunteering projects can harness the ‘power of youth’ for your Trust wherever you need it most. Examples of department-specific projects at Birmingham Women’s and Children’s have included Junior Volunteers writing more accessible patient information, learning and championing CPR, creating board games to address mental health issues, campaigning for organ donation, making artworks based on genetics, contributing to an emotional wellbeing consultation, and designing posters to raise awareness around seizures, sunburn and road accident prevention. Participants have passed on their new-found knowledge through school assemblies and similar activities, helping to raise awareness of health issues within some of Birmingham’s most deprived communities.

The programme has great potential to be used strategically as well. For example:

* targeting specific communities with projects relevant to their populations’ common health issues, encouraging greater engagement with the NHS among these hard-to-reach groups
* addressing national priorities, such as decreasing pressure on urgent and critical care services (such as Birmingham Women’s and Children’s ‘Choose Wisely’ events, during which young people are taught about appropriate alternatives to urgent and critical care for non-urgent health issues.)

Good luck and have fun!

**Birmingham Women’s and Children’s Volunteer Service**