



Kent and Medway
NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust



Your news bulletin from KMPT Voluntary services

Welcome to Volunteer Voices...

We apologise for the late arrival of this month's newsletter. After the sad announcement on Friday that His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh had died, we would like to dedicate this newsletter to all of the amazing work he did for charity and to promoting the roles of volunteers within organisations. He held the position of patron, president and member of a vast amount of charitable groups including the British Heart Foundation and World Wildlife Foundation, as well as being the founder of the Duke Of Edinburgh Award which actively promotes volunteering as part of its programme of activities for young people. His contribution towards public service will never be forgotten and we send our thoughts to the Royal Family at this time.

As we enter April, stage one of the government's roadmap is now in full swing, with us being able to meet as groups of six (or two households) outside. It's a shame the weather hasn't decided to play ball, with a lot of us experiencing cold winds and even snow over the bank holiday weekend!

Despite the weather, this new found freedom and first steps towards 'normality' are huge and we hope that you have all managed to be reunited with friends and family, or will be soon. The good news continues, as KMPT has issued its own COVID-19 roadmap, which is in-line with the government's own guidelines. This includes the re-introduction of volunteer placements which is being done on a case-by-case basis, which means some Trust sites will have different requirements to others. In brief, if you would like to return to your regular volunteering then you must let Voluntary services know in the first instance. We will then contact your site and supervisor to find out what opportunities are possible.

It's now been over a year since the UK went into its first national lockdown, and we want to take this opportunity to say THANK YOU. Each and every one of you have stepped up to the challenges we have faced and found new and innovative ways to show your support. We wouldn't have been able to provide as many incredible opportunities to our patients and staff without your help, and we can't wait to be able to thank you all in person.

The past year has been incredibly tough on us all and we just want to remind everyone that it's okay to not be okay in this ever-changing climate. If you are struggling or just feel like talking to someone, please reach out to your friends, family members or to [helplines that are available](#) to support you.

For now, please read about what we've been up to as a team and remember to get in touch if you want to be more involved in any of our upcoming activities.

You're all amazing.

Our PAT dog volunteers will be visiting throughout April

April is [National Pet Month](#)!

To celebrate, our wonderful Pets as Therapy (PAT) dog volunteers, Shane and Bonny, will be visiting the Priority House site in Maidstone every Tuesday to go for walks with the dogs, patients and Occupational therapy staff.

They will be on site on Tuesday 6, 13, 20 and 27 April, plus a bonus week on 4 May.

Evidence shows us that using animals to provide stimulation has significant therapeutic benefits for people experiencing physical and mental ill health.

Shane said: "We've both enjoyed volunteering/working with volunteers, and we've always been lovers of dogs. Having Babu, our Irish Wolfhound, join our family as a puppy, we realised that this dog with such a kind and gentle temperament could bring joy to many people. Babu and I joined Pets As Therapy when he was a year old and straight away started visiting Priority House, and quickly got used to the work. Over the past seven years, other dogs have joined and now Babu, Sabbath and Jinja are on the rota. My husband Bonny started volunteering alongside me over three years ago when he retired, and we love being able to work together.

"We both enjoy the work immensely, and can see the pleasure that our visits bring to both service users and staff. It is hard not to notice these giant hairy beasts strolling down the corridors and on to the wards, always glad to stop for a friendly hello, or an impromptu snooze on the floor. We ourselves benefit from the calming effect of our dogs, and it gives us great pleasure to share this with all at Priority House."



Easter treats

The amazing Sue Gadsdon, Clinical lead occupational therapist, and her occupational health colleagues, beavered away making some easter treats for our inpatients across Kent. They made Easter bunnies and wrapped chocolate eggs that had been donated by local supermarkets.

Our wonderful husband and wife volunteering team, Norman and Sue, kindly delivered the baskets for us. They drove to Littlestone in Dartford to pick them up and to all of the older adult wards in Dartford, Canterbury and Thanet to deliver them the Thursday before Good Friday, so the patients were able to receive them in plenty of time for the Easter weekend.

We hope they all enjoyed their Easter gifts. A great big thank you go to Norman and Sue for their hard work delivering the gift baskets!



The reviews are in for our March book club

Our second book for the Voluntary services' book club was *The Outrun* by Amy Liptrot. Both Erica and Alan from the club have written reviews for us...

Erica

This book is Amy's own story of growing up on a small farm on Orkney, the perils and hardships of island life, her father's struggle with his mental health and her eventual escape to university and then London for work.

In London she discovers a hedonistic lifestyle with drugs and alcohol dominating everything she does. She loses her job, her boyfriend and her self respect. At thirty she returns home as a recovering

alcoholic to her family's farm, the harsh elements, the relentless wind, the cycle of the seasons and memories of her childhood.

She tells movingly of her healing relationship with nature, swimming in the bracingly cold sea, star gazing, her nightlife now listening for the illusive corncrake, watching swooping arctic terns by day and the weather, wild and dominating. The delight of a new underwater world found through snorkelling, the myths and legends of island life and the opposing forces that rule all our lives. She is two years sober at the end of her story helped by her sheer determination, will power, hope and island wilderness.

We had a mixed reaction to this read. I recommended it and I loved her writing style and the redemptive second half of the book, the healing relationship with nature and I found her courage inspiring. Others found it slow and didn't seem to engage completely with Amy, one person said I 'soldiered' on and a couple hadn't finished it.

The book itself is of contrasts. Amy's inner and outer worlds, London and the wildness of Orkney, hedonism and sobriety and that is exactly how us readers felt about it, with not much middle ground, those opposing forces that Amy writes about were also present in our assessment of her book.

Alan

Most people enjoy a drink or two. Sometimes they'll get through half a dozen or a dozen drinks and regret it the following day. The more you drink, the more you risk it becoming a compulsive habit impossible to shake without help.

The Outrun tells the story of a young woman magazine writer who returns to the Orkneys where she grew up after years of drink abuse in London.

It is the author's first book, and it relates her self-imposed battle with alcohol. Locked away in isolated cottages surrounded by wildlife, and lulled by the cries of birds, her story is leavened by the frequent cravings and the countdown of alcohol-free days.

It is thought-provoking, but one wonders whether Ms Liptrot will have another book waiting to be written. I somehow doubt it.

Thank you Erica and Alan for your insights! If you're interested in joining our book club, then please email louise.blackwood@nhs.net

My volunteering journey

We love hearing about how, why and when our volunteers became involved with KMPT, and the impact that volunteering has had on them.

We caught up with Nina Phoenix, our Occupational therapy clinical lead, about her journey with volunteering at KMPT when she was a student and how it led to her incredible career opportunities.



In 2012 I was a second year student at St Martins and fell in love with the hospital. When I finished my placement I didn't want to leave. So I took the initiative and spoke to the volunteer coordinator Helen Collins. Helen supported me in continuing to volunteer at the hospital throughout my occupational therapy (OT) studies. This allowed me to continue developing my skills with clinical working and add value to my CV when it came to applying for roles. I was given additional support by the OT clinical lead at that time, Leonie Down. She linked me up with the OTs on site and I was able to join the weekly Community Link group where we took patients out in the minibus to the beach or the zoo. I was able to develop my skills of functional assessment, therapeutic rapport and continue to learn about different mental health conditions. My driving licence also allowed me to drive the minibus on some occasions, which I really enjoyed.

I continued volunteering until I completed my OT degree, regularly taking patients to R-place (based in the former St Martins Hospital building) to play pool or cooking on the ward. In the summer of 2013 I was offered a paid role on the KMPT bank. I worked two shifts a week in Dudley Venables House, the male Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) ward. Eventually the band 5, Nick, who had been my Practice educator, moved onto a Band 6 role; I applied for the vacant band 5 post and was successful in obtaining my first band 5 role. Since then I have worked as a band 5 on PICU wards and acute admission wards; been a band 6 Care coordinator in the community mental health team and then a band 6 Senior OT on the acute wards. I have also been a Deputy ward manager during therapeutic staffing and I have since taken over the role of band 7 OT clinical lead (and oddly enough I now manage the team that I was once a student with). I am now seconded two days a week with the placements team as a Practice placement facilitator supporting Teresa Buchan with Allied health professional placements. In addition to all of this, KMPT has funded and supported my masters degree which I am due to finish in May 2021.

Throughout my journey I have continued to advocate for the roles of volunteers, encouraging patients to join the bank as Peer support workers or to work in Webb's garden. We have had volunteers running art groups and pamper sessions on the wards and we will be very pleased to have Judith's Angels, who provide pampering sessions for our patients, back with us. Being a volunteer when you are a student OT, psychologist, music therapist or even a student nurse will add value to your skills and employability.

Come and join us, you just don't know where it will lead!

The Connect Request show is back

We have some exciting news - on Monday 15 March we re-launched the Connect Request show on Canterbury's community and student radio station, CSR FM!

Chris Fallon, our volunteer DJ, is producing the show, which is broadcast every Monday between 12-1pm.

The show is all about providing a playlist for its listeners and is a pure hour of song requests to help connect people through their love of music.

The show can be listened to online on any device with speakers on <https://csrfm.com/shows/connect-request-show/>

Don't forget to send your song requests to zoe.young4@nhs.net so you can hear your favourite song played on the show.



Upcoming events for Voluntary services

We have a lot of activities coming up as part of our Voluntary services programme.

During 8 and 9 April, we are celebrating Community Garden Week by offering staff and volunteers the opportunity to have a private tour of Webb's garden, in Canterbury. We also have an open day at Webb's on Tuesday 27 April, where there will be plant and vegetable sales, a raffle and garden tours.

In May, we will be running a series of walks for staff and patients around our Maidstone site for Mental Health Awareness Week, as this year's theme is 'nature and the environment'. Our own Stephen Tucker, Voluntary services coordinator and Rev. Ruth Bierbaum, our Chaplain in Maidstone, are both keen nature lovers and so will be hosting private walks discovering 'birds, bugs and butterflies' amongst other wonders.

As part of the week, we are also asking people to get their creative juices flowing and send us their artistic interpretations of 'nature and the environment'. This could be a painting, sketch, collage, photograph or any other way you would like to represent what nature and the environment mean to you. We can't wait to see your creations, which will be displayed during Mental Health Awareness Week at our Canterbury, Maidstone and Dartford sites, as well as on our social media pages. If you'd like to submit your artwork, then please email them to: kmpt.communications@nhs.net

We will also be celebrating '[time for a cuppa](#)' with our dementia services and groups - as well as honouring the amazing work of the participants from our 'Time and Place' poetry project, by reading [their poetry](#) as part of our book club in May.

If you're interested in joining us for any of the above activities, or have any ideas for ways to celebrate any upcoming national days, then please get in touch: kmpt.voluntaryservices@nhs.net



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