

Humanising Healthcare

Service user involvement in the recruitment and training of radiography students

Top tips from our service user volunteers



CITY
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& care charity

Sustainable and effective service user involvement

Involving patients and carers in healthcare education is crucial to excellent future care delivery. That's why Breast Cancer Now and City, University of London are collaborating to humanise healthcare, by facilitating service user involvement in the recruitment and education of future healthcare professionals.

Read our Academics' Q&A to find out how service users are involved.

What makes service user involvement sustainable and effective is the reciprocal nature of the relationship – the extraordinary range of skills they bring, and how much they benefit too.

'When I saw the advert, it seemed to marry up the skills I had – my professional experience of interviewing, teaching, managing – with my experience of breast cancer. I thought it was something I could contribute to. It was also something for me – to make my experience into something positive.'

– Flora, volunteer for 3-4 years

'My beautiful youngest child died of breast cancer at 33 – I wanted to carry her memory forward for the benefit of the future. I thought this collaboration was a wonderful opportunity to see young people and their enthusiasm and to encourage them in their chosen profession. I was a diagnostic radiographer myself in the past, but it's so much different now! I've learnt a huge amount from them and feel very privileged to be involved in the education of these wonderful young people.'

– Amanda, volunteer for 6 years

Our volunteers' top tips

Our volunteers share their experience of being involved at City, University of London, and what it is that makes them feel valued and keeps their commitment – from the interactions, to the logistics and the activities.

Understand my motivations

'Getting involved is a two-way benefit. I want to pass on my own experience to future healthcare professionals and improve future patient experience – but I benefit so much too and that's what keeps me motivated and enjoying my role. Whether it's being able to carry on the memory of my daughter to the benefit of future generations, or the chance to interact with students and seeing them passionate and enthusiastic about their profession – having a sense of reciprocal benefit is what helps sustain my involvement.' – Amanda

See my skillset

'As we tell the students – I'm more than my diagnosis. My professional experience as a former teacher complements my experience as a patient to help me fulfil my role at City – such as on the interview panels that include a staff member, a practising radiographer and a volunteer, which shows a far-sighted approach to bringing into the profession the very best. I appreciate being respected and treated as part of the team, and greatly value the discussion meetings that have taken place with staff members, students and volunteers.' – Jan

Different kinds of experiences

'There's always a challenge to find a bigger demographic – recruiting volunteers can be challenging, and even more so to get a good variety of experiences and backgrounds – that's why it's important to think about how and where you're advertising, and work with a charity partner to look at ways you can attract new voices so your students are hearing about different kinds of experiences.' – Rocio

One point of contact

'It is really important to know who I can contact to get answers to any questions I might have – having someone to coordinate it who can give me clear knowledge on what I'm doing, and make sure the paperwork is clear and straightforward. There is a professional bond between the person at City who is coordinating and the service user volunteers, that is extremely important.' – Sue

Let us learn from each other

'Especially the first time you volunteer, it's helpful having that guidance from someone who has done it before, to tell you what you can and can't do, and even having the opportunity to watch them in action. Throughout the role, give us the chance to share tips and hear from each other what's working and new things to try to make our role with the students more effective.' – Annette

Give guidance to the students and us

'My biggest concern was whether I would understand exactly what we were going to be doing and just understanding all the medical terms! I was also worried the students might ask me questions I didn't know the answer to – that was actually ok because as a patient, they're only going to ask you things that you're going to know the answer to! But some students need a little help to be able to take part in discussions – perhaps giving guidance to the students on what to ask, and ideas for us as volunteers to draw in perhaps the quietest to take part by asking them questions to make the session more interactive.' – Sue

The university environment

'Having a really supportive staff team makes it a great environment – the enthusiasm and positive atmosphere are motivating and make it rewarding to be a part of. Underlying there's a real passion at City and a real caring that then comes through to us. Their enthusiasm rubs off on us as volunteers and makes this role feel very special to be a part of.' – Rocio

Feedback both ways

'It's important for us to be able to give feedback on the role and process, and help to iron out any issues and improve things. It doesn't always have to be in a formal way – giving us space to talk through our experience and debrief is also useful. I also value the thanks and feedback I get from staff, just being made to feel like I'm doing a good job.' – Annette

The personal touch

'The relationships we've formed are what make this volunteering really special – the fact the university staff are all so relaxed and friendly and welcoming to us, they've really got to know us. And creating that space to talk to each other – it's an important part of the experience being able to connect with the other volunteers, that makes it extra rewarding.' – Fiona

'Without this I might still take part as I love the students, but it wouldn't be the same, it would be more like a job – but it's something much more than that.'

– Jan, volunteer for 6 years

Find out more about the collaboration between Breast Cancer Now and City, University of London on our webpage: breastcancernow.org/humanising-healthcare

Contact Breast Cancer Now's Patient Experience Lead, Susanna Glover, to talk about recruiting your own volunteers: Susanna.Glover@breastcancernow.org

You can read more about Breast Cancer Now's network of supporters at: breastcancernow.org/breast-cancer-voices