

# People First Volunteering Experience

April 2024

[Wearepeoplefirst.co.uk](http://Wearepeoplefirst.co.uk)

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# Foreword

Volunteering is a huge part of what we do at People First; we started out as a volunteer-led organisation working for people with learning disabilities and have grown into the well respected and impactful charity we are today.

## Our mission is:

We exist to support every customer to live their best life:

- We speak out fearlessly, for those who cannot speak out for themselves
- We stand shoulder to shoulder with people as they work through their most challenging times
- We challenge services to improve based on people's real lived experiences
- We build people's skills so that they can lead healthier and fulfilled lives
- We connect people to communities, so that they feel included

This is our first standalone volunteering report at People First, and it gives us a good idea of where we are, and where we need to be going when it comes to volunteers.

# Q1: Which area do you volunteer in?

Responses:

- Cumbria 59.1%
- Lancashire 40.9%

Within People First, we currently have Volunteers across Lancashire and Cumbria and each area has a dedicated Volunteer coordinator.

In Cumbria, we currently have 24 active volunteers with 54% of them completing the survey. In Lancashire we currently have 18 active volunteers with 56% of them completing the survey.

The survey was sent out as an email, and paper copies were also distributed. Some volunteers were given 1:1 support to complete the survey. In future we need to make sure the process is even more inclusive and accessible by offering Easy Read surveys and possibly other ways to gather feedback.

In Cumbria we currently have 10 different volunteering roles with active volunteers. We are trying to be as inclusive and flexible with our volunteering opportunities as possible.

In Lancashire, we currently have 2 volunteering roles for People First and 6 for Healthwatch. One of the People First roles has not been filled, but there are at least 2 people in every role across Healthwatch Lancashire.

All of our role descriptions can be accessed here: <https://btr.im/0ls25>

# Q2: Who do you volunteer for?

## Cumbria:

- Healthwatch 38.5%
- People First 61.5%

In Cumbria, we currently have 3 different volunteering roles across the 2 different Healthwatch with 11 active volunteers.

In People First, we have 7 different roles available and 13 active volunteers (at the time of the survey).

## Lancashire:

- Healthwatch 88.9%
- People First 11.1%

In Lancashire, we have 6 different roles available for Healthwatch, with 13 active volunteers (at the time of the survey) and a further 7 volunteers taking some time away from volunteering.

We also have 2 different roles for People First within the Self-Advocacy team, with 5 long term volunteers.



# Q3: Which department do you volunteer for?

Responses:

- Café 42%
- Healthwatch 33%
- Advocacy 17%
- Conference Centre 8%

We have the following roles available within People First; Café, Youth Work, Self Advocacy Support, Advocacy support, Conference centre support, Work Placement support and Benefits Support.

We also have the potential to have an admin support role in the future when the supervision is available. We are also in the process of developing a kitchen porter volunteer role.

Within Healthwatch we have 3 different roles in Cumbria: Engagement, Research and Enter & View Volunteers.

In Lancashire we have the three above plus Mystery Shopping Volunteers, Lancashire County Council Citizen Involvement Volunteers, and Community Champions. There are also Self Advocacy and Administration roles for People First.

# Q4: What made you want to volunteer for People First/Healthwatch?

(Please note: Volunteers could choose more than one answer)

## Cumbria

Responses:

- Meet new people 23.1%
- Challenge myself 30.8%
- Learn about my community 23.1%
- Make a difference in Health and social care 46.2%
- Personal experience motivated me to volunteer 30.8%
- Wanted to be involved with PF/HW 15.4%
- Someone I know was supported by PF//HW 7.7%
- To gain experience 30.8%
- To improve my mental/physical health 30.8%
- Other 3%

In Cumbria the main reason that people started to volunteer was to make a difference in Health & Social care followed by improving their own mental or physical health and gaining experience. People's personal experiences have motivated them to volunteer and they are looking to challenge themselves. Meeting new people and learning more about their own communities also featured high on the list.

# Lancashire

## Responses:

- Meet new people 44.4%
- Challenge myself 55.6%
- Learn about my community 44.4%
- Make a difference in Health and social care 77.8%
- Personal experience motivated me to volunteer 44.4%
- Wanted to be involved with PF / HW 22.2%
- Wanted to stay involved with H&S care after retiring 44.4%
- To gain experience 44.4%
- To improve my mental/physical health 22.2%
- Other 11.1%

In Lancashire, the main motivation to volunteer was to make a difference in Health & Social care followed by volunteers' desire to challenge themselves. People's personal experiences have also motivated them to volunteer and they are looking to meet new people, learn about their community and gain experience as well.

# Q5: How did you hear about People First / Healthwatch?

## Cumbria

Responses:

- Leaflet 9.1%
- Someone told me about you 18.2%
- Word of mouth 9.1%
- A community event 18.2%
- Came to my group/community space 18.2%
- Cumbria CVS 18.2%
- Other 9.1%

## Lancashire

Responses:

- Leaflet 11.1%
- Someone told me about you 22.2%
- Poster 11.1%
- A community event 22.2%
- Newsletter 11.1%
- Lancashire Post 11.1%
- Other 11.1%

# Q6: What keeps you volunteering here?

## Cumbria

### Responses:

- Interest and responsibility
- Variety of role
- Being part of a team
- Helping people
- Experience before employment
- Give something back

In Cumbria the main source of engagement with new volunteers has been through face to face contact either at an event or word of mouth. It is important to keep a presence in the community to increase this contact either through volunteer fairs or community events. Maintaining good links with Cumbria CVS is also important as well as having up to date vacancies listed on their new volunteering database.

To keep volunteers engaged we need to treat them as part of the team and offer a wide variety of flexible volunteering roles to suit all needs and abilities.

# Lancashire

Responses:

- Trying to improve provision of Health and Social Care
- I enjoy meeting different people and visiting different places and situations.
- Peer and staff support. Different volunteering opportunities. No pressure to volunteer
- Variety of experiences  
The welcoming and motivated Healthwatch staff
- The good people I work with
- Interest in Health and Social Care
- Running meetings in Lancaster

In Lancashire, the main things keeping volunteers engaged are the different opportunities available, as well as the welcoming nature of the staff and other people who work here.

In order to keep volunteers engaged, we will need to continue to treating them as part of the team, and offer as many different experiences as possible.

# Q7: Have you experienced any barriers or difficulties in volunteering here?

## Cumbria

Responses:

- Yes 38.5%
- No 61.5%

Barriers mentioned:

- Transport
- Lack of coordination between teams
- Lack of communication due to P/T Staff
- Personal health issues

In Cumbria we can see that there are still barriers to people being able to volunteer for us. We need to work harder to try to remove these barriers and make our volunteering more inclusive to all.

One of the main barriers is transport as we are a large County with rural areas and poor public transport. Having pockets of volunteers in areas that can support each other is one way to support this. Having regular events in these areas is also important to keep the volunteers engaged whilst using their

knowledge of their local communities. Making meetings and events accessible both in person and over teams is also important to overcoming this barrier.

Being flexible with our volunteering opportunities to support people's personal health issues where possible is also important.

Improving the communication between different areas of the business, especially if a volunteer has a dual role across multiple teams, is important. We need to make sure their key supervisor has an overview of all of the volunteer's tasks.

As the number of volunteers grows, it will be important to have more staff hours to co-ordinate and meet the needs of the volunteers. Part time working can cause delay and frustrations and this could be easily resolved.

## Lancashire

Responses:

- Yes 22.2%
- No 77.8%

Barriers mentioned:

- Lack of confidence in technology
- Lack of confidence in own ability

The only barriers or difficulties experienced by volunteers in Lancashire were a lack of confidence in technology and a lack of confidence in their own abilities.

In the same comments, volunteers have stated that they did receive support with both of these.



Support is always offered to access any areas of volunteering which require the use of technology, and the nature of volunteering opportunities at Healthwatch does mean that it can take a while to build confidence in the role.

In order to help with this, we have arranged some extra volunteer training to try and support the areas volunteers have found most challenging.

We must continue to ensure that we offer frequent feedback and training to help volunteers feel more confident in their roles.

# Q8: Have you received support to access or keep volunteering here?

## Cumbria

Responses:

- Yes 66.7%
- No 33.3%

Support mentioned:

- Assistance with training and forms
- Help with Better Impact
- Support to volunteer from home
- Regular 1:1
- Cafe team leader and job coaches
- Hybrid meetings

As you can see, two thirds of the volunteers in Cumbria have received support to volunteer. With one third either not requiring support or not receiving it. We need to ensure all volunteers received the right level of support for them.

Some of the support which has been highlighted so far is the support and assistance with either filling in forms both paper and

digital and support to access and undertake training relevant to the role.

Support has been provided to access and use our new volunteering database Better Impact for both volunteers and staff.

Regular 1:1 support sessions have been highlighted as being beneficial to both volunteers and their supervisors to pin point areas for growth and development.

We have provided, where appropriate, support to volunteers to be able to volunteer from home and contribute at a time that suits them and their needs. This has included making meetings and training available in a hybrid format where appropriate.

The Café team leader - Trish - and Job coaches have been highlighted as providing great support when volunteering in the Café.

## Lancashire

Responses:

- Yes 88.9%
- No 11.1%

Support mentioned:

- Ongoing training
- Regular 1:1 and phone calls
- Help with technology
- Feedback after engagements
- Keeping in touch

The majority of volunteers in Lancashire have received support to volunteer here. The support has varied and can include any of the following:

- Support to complete forms
- Extra flexibility in their volunteering
- More frequent support & supervision meetings
- One to one support with online training due to language barriers.
- Assistance with transport to an event

All of the volunteers found the support they received either very helpful or extremely helpful. This means that where a volunteer or coordinator identifies a support need, those needs are being met well.

# Q9: How would you rate that support?

## Cumbria

Responses:

- Extremely helpful 40%
- Very helpful 30%
- It was okay 30%

## Lancashire

Responses:

- Extremely helpful 55.6%
- Very helpful 44.4%

# Q10: What would make it easier for you to volunteer?

## Cumbria

Responses:

- More learning resources
- More regular 1:1
- Larger kitchen at café
- Better public transport
- Easy read options
- Better coordination and organisation

Additional elements which would make it easier to volunteer here include a bigger Kitchen area at the café and better Public transport.

Elements which are more achievable include;

- More learning resources, (this is specific to Advocacy volunteers).
- More regular one to ones. (This is volunteer specific as different individuals and roles have different requirements. )
- Better communication, coordination and organisation between the different areas of People First.
- More easy read, accessible forms. (This is going to be made a priority moving forward. )

# Lancashire

Responses:

- More flexible PLACE training dates
- Being part of a team
- Everything okay
- Opportunities nearer my house

In Lancashire, volunteers expressed that there were a number of things that would make volunteering easier for them. Feeling part of a team was one of these.

Lancashire is a very large county and bringing volunteers together has some logistical difficulties. More frequent volunteer meetings would be welcome so that volunteers do not feel isolated.

PLACE training dates are unfortunately not under our control, and some volunteers missed out on some opportunities last year due to not being able to attend a training day.

# Q11: Do you feel you have enough contact with your volunteer supervisor?

## Cumbria

Responses:

- Yes 69.2%
- No 30.8%

## Lancashire

Responses:

- Yes 100%



# Q12: How is the communication with your team and volunteer supervisor?

## Cumbria

Responses:

- Excellent 41.7%
- Good 33.3%
- Could be better 25%

## Lancashire

Responses:

- Excellent 44.4%
- Good 55.6%

# Q13: How often would you like to meet up with other volunteers?

## Cumbria

Responses:

- Monthly 16.7%
- Every 3 months 83.3%

## Lancashire

Responses:

- Monthly 30%
- Every 3 months 50%
- Fortnightly 10%
- Every 6 months 10%

# Q14: How would you like to meet up?

## Cumbria

Responses:

- In person 33.3%
- Either / both 66.7%

In Cumbria, the majority of volunteers would like to meet up every 3 months or so and 1/3 have said in person with 2/3 requesting a combination/ hybrid mix.

We will be looking at how we can facilitate this in the near future. We will be bringing volunteers together for Summer Ops day/ Volunteers week and we have a Festive gathering at Christmas time.

We need to build on these social events to continue to make volunteers feel part of the team and have the ability to mix with each other.

## Lancashire

Responses:

- In person 66.7%
- Either / both 33.3%

In Lancashire, the majority of volunteers would like to meet up either quarterly or monthly, with the majority preferring in-person meet ups.

We will facilitate this by arranging more regular meet ups in the different areas of Lancashire, as well as more opportunities for training for volunteers in Leyland.

We will also facilitate quarterly online volunteer meetings as well as Christmas and summer meet ups.

# Q15: Do you feel you have adequate training for your role?

## Cumbria

Responses:

- Yes 71.4%
- No 28.6%

In Cumbria the majority of volunteers feel like they do have adequate training to fulfil their volunteering role. But there are a number who feel that they would like more.

We need to look closely at this to provide all volunteers with the right training for their role so they can feel confident performing it.

## Lancashire

Responses:

- Yes 88.9%
- No 11.1%

In Lancashire, the majority of volunteers feel that they have received adequate training for their role, however there are a few who would like more training.

Most of our volunteers are Engagement or Enter & View volunteers and our previous training was completed whilst shadowing an Engagement Officer. However, we have recently changed that training based on previous feedback and observations. The first new training course was completed in March.

# Q16: Is there any training you would like?

## Cumbria

Responses:

- More advocacy specific training
- Training for closing up the café
- Shadowing for my first engagement

Advocacy volunteering is the most demanding role we offer but can also be the most rewarding. We need to ensure that all of our advocacy volunteers receive the training they need to fulfil this sometimes challenging role, along with the 1:1 support to off load and reassure when required.

Opportunities to extend a person's skills for example taking on more responsibility is also important to facilitate and the individual who wanted more training in the café has received this, following this survey, and is now performing that task regularly.

It is important that we build up our volunteers skills and a way to do this is allowing them to shadow before they are expected to take on the responsibility. Understanding our volunteers strengths and challenges is key here.

# Lancashire

Responses:

- Working with the homeless
- Office placement
- Working with asylum seekers

Volunteers in Lancashire are regularly invited to online talks and to team meetings where other organisations talk to the team about their work. We have not yet had one around the subject of working with the homeless, but this is something we can organise.

We used to participate in a project working with Asylum Seekers in Lancashire, and there were some volunteering opportunities as part of that, but this has since finished.

We do not currently offer an office volunteering role, but we are currently considering how we can create that role.



# Q17: Do you have adequate support for your role?

## Cumbria

Responses:

- Yes 75%
- No 25%

In Cumbria 3/4 of volunteers that responded said they had adequate support to carry out their volunteering role. While 1/4 said they required more support than they were receiving.

What extra support could we provide?

Responses:

- More accessible ways to record information
- More easy read options
- More 1:1 support meetings
- More debriefs post project

## Lancashire

Responses:

- Yes 88.9%
- No 11.1%

The majority of volunteers in Lancashire felt that they have adequate support to carry out their role. However, 11% did say no to this.

Unfortunately, volunteers in Lancashire were not able to identify specific support they would like.

In order to help volunteers feel more supported, we will explore a number of different options for personalised support. We have already created and carried out new training, set up new opportunities for volunteers to meet up online and in person, and started sending out a quarterly volunteering update.

# Q18: Do you feel confident and comfortable booking activities and shifts for your volunteering?

## Cumbria

Responses:

- Yes 84.6%
- No 15.4%

## Lancashire

Responses:

- Yes 88.9%
- No 11.1%

# How could we improve this?

## Cumbria

Responses:

- Provide activity related contact details
- Not happy using Better Impact
- In person
- Face to face or over the phone

## Lancashire

Responses:

- Opportunities a bit confusing
- Not happy using Better Impact
- Planning ahead
- More training

# Q19: Are there enough opportunities on offer?

## Cumbria

Responses:

- Yes 54.5%
- No 45.5%

## Lancashire

Responses:

- Yes 66.7%
- No 33.3%

# What would you like to see more / less of?

## Cumbria

- Opportunities
- Different kinds of manual work
- Typing up notes and documents

## Lancashire

- Feedback on the difference made
- Not enough
- Praise for NHS – good stories
- Marginalised groups

# Q20: Would you recommend volunteering for People First/Healthwatch?

Could you describe why?

Cumbria

Responses:

- Yes 100%
- Interesting range of projects
- Help people
- Help people's voices be heard
- Improve Health and social care
- Interesting
- Passionate about signposting
- Working alongside the learners
- Great environment
- Good support
- Warm welcome

# Lancashire

Responses:

- Yes 88.9%
  - No 11.1%
- 
- Great opportunity
  - You can learn a lot
  - Making a difference
  - Hard to explain what we do



# Q21: Do you wish to share anything else with us?

## Cumbria

- No
- Make sure communication is good
- I am happy

## Lancashire

The only comments received were the following:

- “I have some concerns with the PLACE Assessments as to whether the hospitals pick up on and make necessary changes to address the issues identified.”
- “You guyz are doing a good work. keep it up”

# Highlights

## Cumbria

Generally the mood and feel for volunteering across Cumbria is good with 100% of volunteers who filled in the survey saying they would recommend volunteering for us. But with 46% of volunteers having not filled in the survey we need to be mindful of their experiences.

This report has highlighted some areas we are good at like providing a hybrid approach to meetings and training where appropriate. And supporting individuals to access our forms and systems. We need to continue to provide this approach where possible due to the large area we cover and make volunteering accessible to all.

We have a good range of different volunteering opportunities across the county but we could benefit from having more of the same roles in different areas for example self advocate volunteers in the south and west of the county.

We need to continue to understand the strengths and challenges faced by all our volunteers and provide them with support through meaningful 1:1 sessions. Building on their experiences and providing them with new opportunities to develop themselves whilst making them and their contributions feel valued by People First.

# Lancashire

In general, volunteers across Lancashire feel supported and well trained. The communication throughout the team is good and the staff team are welcoming and friendly.

However, there were a large number of volunteers who did not complete the survey and we do need to be mindful of that gap in our knowledge and how those volunteers may be feeling.

We do need to work on the process of signing up for activities and engagements, as well as making sure that all volunteers receive adequate support for their roles. Those who have received support have given positive feedback, but we do need to ensure that the support we offer is flexible according to the needs of each volunteer.

The feedback from the volunteer who answered that they would not recommend volunteering here was that the brief can be a bit vague and that Healthwatch is not very well known, so explaining what you do can be challenging. These are things we need to support volunteers with more.

# Recommendations for Cumbria

Our recommendations for focus and attention in Cumbria are:

- Develop a volunteering strategy which is threaded through all of our work and does not become a stand alone document.
- Make sure that all volunteering is accessible in line with our mission statement. Some suggestions include having easy read documents and forms readily available, as well as resourcing extra support for those who need it.
- Develop new roles for volunteers . These roles should be adequately resourced and supported.
- Ensure better communication between teams across the organisation.
- Create more opportunities for volunteers to interact with each other. As well as creating a buddy system to allow volunteers to support each other.
- Include volunteers in project specific debriefs and feedback sessions. This way, volunteers can see the impact they have made.
- Create better shift patterns in the café This should stop there being too many people in the small space all at once.

# Recommendations for Lancashire

After taking the time to consider the responses to this survey, we are making 6 recommendations for the next year in Lancashire.

- Offer more opportunities for volunteers to meet or get together. This will enable volunteers to feel more part of a team.
- Offer specific, in-person initial training in order to support volunteers in their roles and improve confidence.
- Communicate impact with volunteers so that they know the difference that their volunteering has made.
- Offer more resources and forms in Easy-Read format in order to make sure our application and volunteering processes are accessible and open to everyone.
- Work on a process for volunteers to find out about and book themselves in to opportunities and training. The process should be equitable and accessible to all volunteers as well as working well for staff.
- Finalise and implement a Volunteer Strategy across the organisation to ensure that volunteers are considered at every level and at every point in every project.