

NHS Lothian's youth volunteers win Young Scot award

The Young Scot Volunteering Award has been presented to the Covid-19 youth volunteers working with NHS Lothian. There are 516 young people aged 16-25 who have volunteered for 17,000 hours helping patients visitors and staff during this past year.

The volunteers offered a helping hand as ward helpers and welcome guides. Some joined the shopping service which gathers lists of essentials for those patients who could not have visitors. Others helped with the Give and Go service collecting and delivering items left by families for patients, and volunteers have also helped in the vaccination programme with information for people attending their appointments.

Malena Allen-Bernad (17) started volunteering with NHS Lothian in October 2019 and has three volunteering roles. She's a ward helper at The Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh and in the East Pavillion at the Astley Ainsley Hospital. Melana also began supporting the vaccination clinics as a welcome/wayfinding guide.

Melana said she's delighted that young volunteers have been acknowledged for their contribution in the fight against

COVID-19. She said, "I think all of us young volunteers are extremely happy and honoured that we've had the opportunity to be part of something that's helped people and our NHS during such a difficult time.

"For young people, lockdown and life during the pandemic has been a huge change. At times it has been difficult to cope with, but you also know that other people are in worse positions than yourself. Since most of us are healthy individuals who have the ability to contribute in some way while others could not, it felt only natural to want to do something that might help. The opportunity to volunteer has been an amazing way to make a positive impact and use our time to help in any way we could.

"For every young volunteer I've spoken to the best part of volunteering is the amazing people you get to meet and the great conversations you have with patients. Patients often express how grateful they are for some company from the volunteers and this has been felt even more acutely over the last year, when visits from loved ones were restricted because of the pandemic.

"In general, volunteering is such a character-building experience and has enabled me to develop so many essential skills that will be important in my future life. A huge thing it's taught me is the power of being kind and being understanding and what a difference that can make to you and the people around you."



Jane Greenacre, Head of Volunteering at NHS Lothian is ecstatic that the young volunteers have been awarded the prestigious Young Scot Award. She said, "We are delighted that Young Scot have acknowledged the incredible contribution our

young people have made to patients, families and staff throughout the COVID pandemic.

“We are immensely proud of our young volunteers who have selflessly given up their time with enthusiasm; demonstrating empathy, kindness and reliability in their varied volunteer placements.

“We are lucky to have nearly 1,000 volunteers within NHS Lothian, who we have a truly unique relationship with. Our helpers of all ages bring something special to our work that compliments the skill and expertise of our staff. This definitely enhances both the patient and visitor experience.

“For our volunteers, they gain an enormous amount through their experience. They have told us that through volunteering their confidence and knowledge has grown and that it has had a positive effect on their mental health.”

Professor Alex McMahon, Executive Director for Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Healthcare Professionals, NHS Lothian explained how lucky the organisation is to have such passionate volunteers. He said, “The pandemic has been an incredibly difficult time for so many people, but yet throughout we have seen so many examples of kindness, compassion and selflessness.

“It has been truly humbling to see so many people across Lothian come forward to volunteer with us. To each and every one of you, both young and old, I would like to say a huge thank you. Through your dedication, you truly have made an incredible impact on our patients, their families and visitors, and on our staff.”

If you are interested in volunteering with NHS Lothian you can find more information [here](#).