

Participation Matters



News and updates

January 2023

It has now been 20 years since the International Day of Disability was set up by the United Nations, with the dual aim of raising awareness and understanding of disability issues and making sure the dignity, rights and wellbeing of those with disabilities is not ignored or overlooked. This year, the focus will be on three overarching themes: inclusive development in employment, reducing inequality, and sport.



This edition of Participation Matters focuses on disability, looking at the positive ways KCHFT supports our colleagues, patients, families and volunteers.

Volunteers

Living with a hidden disability

Laura started volunteering at Gravesham Community Hospital (GCH) outpatients department in 2015. She lives with two disabilities but this hasn't stopped her supporting KCHFT, even through the pandemic.

"I have two disabilities; the obvious one (only obvious because I now carry a short white stick) is that I am partially blind. The other more serious and hidden disability is my memory impairment. There is nothing that can be done about my sight but, as always, I look on the bright side and I managed to get my bus pass very early!

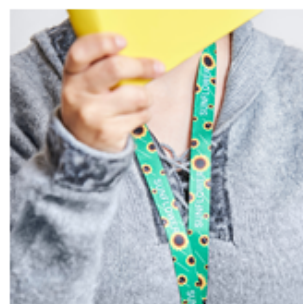


“My memory impairment is known as a hidden disability. So hidden it took me a while to remember I had one! I laugh now but in the early days it was a struggle for my family to understand and learn how to cope but they do so very well now.

“In September 2011 I suffered the first in a series of brain haemorrhages that wiped out my short-term memory and peripheral vision. I spent a total of 13 months in three different hospitals. With support from a psychologist and occupational therapist, I can now function in the world, live independently and volunteer for numerous organisations.

“At GCH, I confirm patient’s arrival on appointment lists and supply hearing aid batteries with a cheerful smile! Throughout the pandemic my role varied. I would support the Urgent Treatment Centre door, ensuring patients were not infectious and escort patients to their clinics. As far as I am aware, I have remembered to take everyone to the correct place!”

A big thank you to Laura who has supported GCH and the trust for seven years! If you would like to volunteer with us, there are a range of roles across Kent – take a look on our website [here](#).



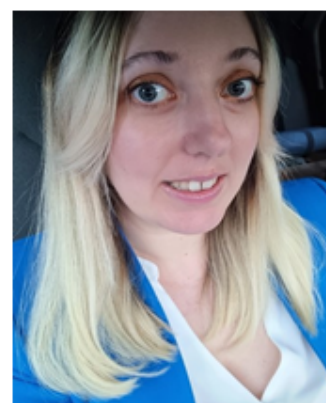
The sunflower lanyard represents hidden disabilities, for example autism, and will make people aware that you may need support in public places like supermarkets. You can usually request a free lanyard from your local supermarket or buy one online.

Our colleagues

Learning to live with dyslexia

Hear from Claire, our Voluntary Services Manager, share her story of working and studying with dyslexia:

“When I was at school I always struggled in English classes, meaning my confidence in written skills was low. When starting my career, I questioned most of the things I did; I’d re-write my emails a hundred times, lacking confidence in my own abilities. Quite often, I would get people’s names back to front, and be mortified I’d made a mistake that was noticed by others.



“I was nervous when I started university later on, knowing full well my writing skills were not great. However, I pushed through my anxieties and returned to full-time education. I never officially knew I had dyslexia and felt ashamed so I never asked for help. In my final year, I was told I would lose marks in my law exams for incorrect spelling and my heart sank. I knew I had to finally speak up. Through the university I was eventually diagnosed with both dyslexia and dyspraxia. I was supported and went on to achieve a first-class honour, which I never thought was possible!

“I came to realise over time that I should not feel ashamed of being dyslexic as its just one of many obstacles in life to overcome. I now speak up if I struggle because of my disability. Unless you knew me well, you wouldn’t guess I had dyslexia but it goes to show that not everything is visible.”

If you have a physical or mental health condition or disability and need support to get or stay in work, go to [Access to Work](#).

Get involved

Working collaboratively to make a difference

Cas and Ray are members of a learning disability group and take part in a variety of initiatives with KCHFT. In November, the pair supported an initiative called Patient-Led Assessment of the Care Environment (PLACE). PLACE assessments are carried out every year in our nine community hospitals, supported by our volunteer patient assessors.

Cas and Ray said: “We enjoyed visiting Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital for the first time. We took part to make sure it was clean and tidy. We were looking at noticeboards and checking for Easy Read. The hospital needs more Easy Read information to support people like us visiting the hospital.



“It’s been great fun for us; we’ve picked up things like the disabled toilet signs being too high and the ceiling tiles needing fixing. We were excited to taste the food too. We checked it was eatable and was good for someone’s diet.

“The nurses and staff were actually wonderful. They were happy and cheerful – that makes patients feel the same way. We’d be more than happy to stay here as a patient.”

Cas and Ray’s feedback will be shared with our Facilities Team so they can look at making improvements to the hospital ward and grounds. We are so grateful for the support of our 25 volunteer patient assessors this year. If you would like to take part in the autumn of next year, please get in touch to find out more at kentchft.engagement@nhs.net.

Did you know

Did you know ...

- Approximately **14.6 million** people in the UK have a disability (22% of the total population)
- More than **4.7 million** disabled people are in work
- The employment rate of disabled people is **53%**, compared to 82% of non-disabled people
- Life can cost **£583** more a month if you have a disability
- **1 in 3** disabled people feel there’s a lot of disability prejudice.

How is KCHFT working towards addressing health inequalities, including those living with a disability?

- a new dedicated health inequalities team
- Disability and Carers Staff Network
- partnership with Kent Supported Employment
- Apple Tree initiative to support people with learning disabilities to access Sexual Health services
- monthly learning disability focus group
- meeting accessible information and communication needs
- and much more ... talk to us for more information at kentchft.engagement@nhs.net.

Our services

How can we support you?

Participation Partners and volunteers can access free online training on E-learning for Healthcare. You can register for and access training [here](#).

You can also access KCHFT wellbeing groups. There is a craft group every Wednesday from 5pm at Trinity House in Ashford, or you can join our trust choir. To find out more, please email kentchft.engagement@nhs.net or phone 0300 013 2045.

One You service

Our One You service provide a number of support services for your health and wellbeing, including weight loss advice and quitting smoking. They also run a volunteer health walk programme, with over 200 volunteers supporting across Kent. For more information, click [here](#) or phone 0300 123 1220.



Interested in getting involved?

To find out more, contact us at kentchft.engagement@nhs.net, phone 0300 013 2045 or visit our [website](#).

Thank you



Our values Compassionate Aspirational Responsive Excellent

www.kentcht.nhs.uk