

Retired nurse Carole Woodlow is one of thousands of healthcare professionals who returned to the NHS to support the coronavirus effort.

Having already clocked up 37 years working at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn NHS Foundation Trust, Carole joined Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust's (CCS) Covid vaccination team in 2021. Here she shares her story...

"I started off as a domestic in theatres and then became an auxiliary, a student nurse and a registered nurse. Before I retired five years ago, I was working in the acute surgical assessment unit at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital which was a very busy environment, and I absolutely loved it.

"I was keen to join the Covid vaccination programme as I was inspired by what my colleagues had done during the pandemic and wanted to do something to support the NHS.

"I thought 'well I can put a needle in someone's arm quite effortlessly' so that's why I went for it. I didn't realise all the online training I'd have to do which baffled me because I'm not computer literate, but I got there in the end!

"I joined the team on 1st February 2021 when we opened the vaccination site at the Corn Exchange in King's Lynn, and I was contracted for three shifts a week although at the beginning I was doing four or five. There was such a buzz, and the adrenaline was certainly flowing when we were vaccinating 400 to 500 people a day.

"In August 2021 we moved to Shakespeare Barn, and I've vaccinated people of all ages, from 100-year-olds down to 5-year-olds.

"After a while I joined the temporary register as a registrar which involved drawing the vaccines up and answering questions for the vaccinators and I found that very rewarding.

"I think the main skill needed above everything else is good communication, not just talking, but the ability to listen as well.

"In terms of challenges, I've found IT the biggest challenge, say no more!

"Over the past 18 months, I've seen so many familiar faces. In fact, on my first day, I thought 'I recognise that voice' and it was Val, one of my tutors when I was a student nurse. She's now a registered practitioner and it's been lovely working together again.

"People used to come in and say: 'Hello Carole!' and our first site lead at the Corn Exchange couldn't believe how many people knew me because of my years working for the NHS and that was a lovely feeling.

"One of my highlights was when we celebrated the NHS' birthday and had a party in the Corn Exchange where we danced to Abba's Dancing Queen. The Mayor of King's Lynn attended, and it was a wonderful feeling to be part of that.

"Another highlight was on my first day vaccinating when we had TV crews on site, and I ended up being on the local and national news and there was even a photo of me vaccinating in several of the local newspapers. Lots of people commented on that and it gave me a big boost.

"What makes me most proud now is walking down the high street in King's Lynn and seeing more people walking about and being normal again and knowing that I've done something towards that.

“The whole vaccination team is just fantastic, lots of new friendships have been made and I know we’ll remain in contact when I retire again at the end of the year.

“We support and care for each other and the rapport with everybody has been absolutely fantastic.

“I feel so proud to have been able to work for the NHS again and have enjoyed every single minute!”