

When the NHS launched a national recruitment drive for people to join the Covid-19 vaccination mission, Trisha Smithe-Norman was one of the first to sign up.

Fast-forward 18 months and she's still working as a vaccinator at Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust's (CCS) large-scale vaccination sites and loving every minute. Here she explains why it holds such a special place in her heart and how she's been inspired to join the NHS workforce.

"The first I heard about the Covid-19 vaccination programme was on the national news in November 2020 when they announced they needed vaccinators and I applied the same night!

"I'd never worked for the NHS previously; I'd been a Slimming World consultant and registered dietician for seven years and, prior to that, I was a custody officer before I had my daughter.

"After completing all the training, I started in February 2021 and have been vaccinating ever since. I absolutely love it and would go so far as to say it's one of the best things I've ever done! I always come to work smiling and love the interaction with patients and staff. I know I'm biased but I do think we have the absolute best team here in Norwich. We come from such a wide range of backgrounds, and everyone is so encouraging and supportive, it's fantastic!

"As well as kind and supportive staff, we also have the most amazing volunteer stewards who all give up their time and do so with a massive smile on their faces and without them our job would be very challenging.

"On average I work four days a week. Initially I was based at North Walsham before being transferred to Castle Quarter in May 2021. Nowadays, the majority of the time I'm based at City Hall, but we also run our outreach programme which involves travelling to different places where we vaccinate people who can't get to us or wouldn't ordinarily come out to be vaccinated.

"One of my highlights was in the winter when we were vaccinating 2500 people a day as part of the government's accelerated booster programme. We didn't think it was actually possible to vaccinate that many people, but we all pulled together and knowing we'd succeeded was very rewarding.

"People skills and the ability to interact, empathise and console are vital. In the early days, we had no end of people coming in, sitting down and being in floods of tears, they wanted the vaccination, but they'd not been out for months.

"Sometimes we get people arrive who are scared of needles and very nervous and we take it step by step and don't rush the appointment. We recognise that the person's come in because they want the vaccination and there are lots of different ways we support them.

"I'm currently vaccinating 5-11-year-olds on a regular basis and that poses its own challenges. Some children are very anxious and don't ever remember having a vaccination previously because they were toddlers at the time. However, we have a brilliant little paediatrics section and it works really well. Even with a 5-year-old, we give them the power and ensure that nothing goes ahead without their consent. We've worked hard to make the vaccination sites engaging and have stickers, storybooks, toys and a chalkboard to help keep little ones occupied.

“I feel a huge sense of pride working for the NHS and am keen to pursue an NHS career in the future. I completed the Care Certificate through CCS, and my dream is to embark on a nursing degree, so I’m currently exploring my options and excited for what the future holds!”