

Georgie Chivers, clinical volunteer with our large-scale Covid-19 vaccination programme, is the latest recipient of our quarterly ‘Valuing our Volunteers’ Award. Georgie began volunteering in March 2021 and has clocked up more than one hundred hours vaccinating at three of our vaccination sites across Cambridge.

Jacqui Taylor, head of clinical operations for large-scale vaccination in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, said: “Georgie gives every one of these hours with good grace, professionalism and a huge smile. She’s always willing to step in at short notice and be flexible to support any role in the hub and she’s a pleasure to work with!”

Here Georgie shares what inspired her to get involved with the largest vaccination programme in NHS History, the highlights and challenges of being a volunteer, how there’s no such thing as an average day, and her advice for anyone keen to join the vaccination team.

“I was inspired to volunteer due to a combination of things, mainly the want to try and do something to help. Normally I’m a neuro physio, I work for myself and in the hospital, however my hospital work ceased a little bit and some of my patients I see in the community didn’t want to be seen for various reasons, so I had a little bit more time.

“I volunteered at my local GP practice, helping with parking and shepherding for the vaccination programme, and then I spotted the opportunity to volunteer at Cambridgeshire Community Service’s large-scale vaccination sites.

“I received a phone call from Jacqui Taylor to say that due to my background as a physio and my qualifications, I could actually do the vaccinations. Jacqui was brilliantly supportive and gave me a huge amount of confidence.

“When I arrived at the Grafton Centre vaccination hub in Cambridge, everybody was so kind and inspiring in their enthusiasm and their confidence and belief in the whole programme. I’d already completed a St John Ambulance face-to-face training course which involved practising vaccinating on a model, as well as some online training and by the end of my first day, I’d done a couple of real vaccinations.

“After that, I signed up to volunteer one day a week and sometimes a weekend too if they were really busy and it’s been fantastic! As well as the Grafton Centre, I’ve volunteered at Chesterton Indoor Bowls Club and Cherry Hinton and there have been many highlights.

“I remember one lady who was incredibly nervous and crying and she came straight through to avoid the queue. She was absolutely terrified of needles and yet she had the bravery to come into the centre and that was so humbling. It’s easy to have the jab if you’re not worried, but this lady was petrified. We managed to vaccinate her, and she was so lovely afterwards, her fears were totally allayed, and she was so grateful and kind.

“Some elderly people have also come in who have been incredibly infirm and their gratitude has just been wonderful, and then you have the other extreme of the much younger generation, some of whom are a bit blasé about being vaccinated but they’re excited and happy afterwards, so it’s been lovely. My highlights have mainly been to do with the joy I get from giving the vaccine and seeing the positive, happy reactions of the people being vaccinated.

“The challenges have involved being pushed out of my comfort zone. A year ago, if you’d told me I’d be vaccinating people, and on some days vaccinating one hundred plus people, I’d have told you I wouldn’t have had the confidence to be able to do that! It’s challenging when you look up and there’s a huge queue, and when you have people come in who are cross because they’ve been waiting and they’re worried and so therefore they tend to be

very abrupt with you, that can be tricky. As time has gone on, I've witnessed a lot going on behind the scenes to make the whole process more efficient.

"The younger generation tend to have more pre-conceptions about the vaccine and be more fearful of the actual injection as they're more aware of fainting or being unwell afterwards and I think some of that's because they see and hear more on social media. In contrast, the elderly, probably because they've had a lot more injections in their life, or they don't look at social media, tend to be much calmer. Having said that it's entertaining vaccinating 16–17-year-olds and I do get a buzz when they come in going 'Oh this is going to hurt!' and then ask, 'Have you done it?' and I say, 'Yes that was it!'

"There's no such thing as an average day at the vaccination sites however a typical day involves arriving at 8am. There's usually a different team every shift so you get to meet who you're working with in your pod and get set up for when the first people arrive at 8.30am. On good days, there's a nice, steady stream of people. We tend to work straight through until midday when we get a half an hour break and then it's the same again until 4pm. Once the last person to be vaccinated has left, we have a thorough clean down.

"The days can be fairly routine but they're never the same because we're vaccinating different people every day and are working with a different team every shift. We come from varied backgrounds but are united in a common cause to ensure life returns to normal life. There's an enormous sense of camaraderie and I always go home with a smile on my face.

"My message for anyone considering volunteering is 'just do it'! The whole team is very supportive and willing to answer any questions and it's incredibly rewarding. It's a lovely environment to work in and very different from anything else I think I'll ever do in my lifetime.

"Being a steward is equally as important as being a vaccinator and the observation and admin roles are critical too. In terms of skills, I think you need to be able to chat to anybody and everybody, as well as be a team player. You're a small part in a very big cog but every single part is necessary for the whole thing to work. Oh, and don't be afraid to ask for help should you need it!

"It's been an absolute pleasure to volunteer and the icing on the cake was to be recognised with this award. Vaccinating has been a huge joy and I feel incredibly grateful to have been able to play my part in history. I think it's one of those things I'll look back on in a few years' time and think 'Oh, well, at least I did a little bit'!"

If you've been inspired to volunteer, we'd love you to join our team! To become a volunteer steward at one of our hubs, you can get more details and sign up via: <https://nhsvolunteerresponders.org.uk/i-want-to-volunteer/volunteer-roles/steward-volunteer>

If you'd like to find out more about administration and clinical volunteer roles, please email: ccs.volunteers@nhs.net