

Retired engineer Martyn Jones has been stewarding at Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust's (CCS) large-scale vaccination sites for just over a year.

Elaine McInnes-Rich, Clinical Operational Lead - Cambridge Pods, said: "Martyn is a long-standing member of the team at Chesterton, and we'd be lost without his support."

Here 67-year-old Martyn explains how he got involved with the largest vaccination programme in NHS history, the highlights and challenges of being a volunteer, and why he has no intention of hanging up his hi vis jacket just yet.

"At the end of February 2020, I retired and went off diving for a month in Indonesia, and when I returned, we went into lockdown. As soon as the NHS began rolling out the vaccination programme and were asking for volunteers, I said to my wife: 'Well the one thing I've got is time so let's see if I can do it!'

"I signed up to become a volunteer through the Royal Voluntary Service and was given some stewarding shifts at Chesterton Indoor Bowls Centre and the Grafton Centre which I enjoyed, so I started doing more and I find I still enjoy it just as much a year later.

"I currently do three shifts a week and have met so many people from all walks of life working in the vaccination centres, it's so varied and 99.9% of people who come in for a vaccine are very grateful for what we're doing.

"I will literally do anything that's needed. If I see something that needs doing, I just get on and do it, I don't wait for somebody to ask. If there's a bin that needs emptying, I'll empty it and if it's quiet and I see rubbish in the car park, I'll get a pair of gloves and a black bin bag and go and pick it up. When I arrive, I like to check everything as I know it helps make things run smoother, for example, I'll check the water machines have water and make sure we have spare masks where they're needed.

"After each shift, I always leave with a smile on my face, it's very rewarding. The staff all work together and muck in, we're all in it together and that's a nice feeling as there's a real team spirit.

"One of the highlights for me was when we started vaccinating clinically extremely vulnerable children and a gentleman came in with his daughter who had Down's syndrome. He looked at my name badge and said: 'Good morning, Martyn, this is my daughter Sophie and she's here for her second vaccination'. I immediately said: 'Good morning, Sophie, can I ask you to sanitise your hands please?' which she did. I was holding her mask and she wasn't too happy so I said to her: 'Would you like one of these?' and pointed to a face shield, and she said: 'Yes'. I then opened a face shield and put it on her, and she was as happy as can be. As she went off to have her vaccination, her dad looked at me and smiled and said: 'Thank you!' and that really got to me. I love seeing the kids because I'm a big kid at heart!

"Another highlight was early on when I was stewarding at the Grafton Centre and an elderly couple arrived and the lady had two carrier bags and said: 'These are for you to thank you for all you're doing'. I don't know how many packs there were but both carrier bags were stuffed with chocolate.

"People's kindness gets to me. As they leave the vaccination site, 99% of people will say: 'Thank you very much' and a lot of them will say: 'Thank you for volunteering', and it's nice to feel appreciated.

"In terms of challenges, we had someone come in who was grumpy and rude to the admin staff on the door and the vaccinator, and as he went to leave the wrong way, I asked if he

could go out the other way and he said; 'Does it make any difference?' and I said: 'Yes it does', and he did turn round and go the other way. Fortunately, we don't get many people like that but when we do, I just shrug it off and before long something cheers me up again.

"Common sense is vital when stewarding as is the ability to talk to people and want to help them. It's important to accept that no two people are the same and react in the same way.

"Many years ago, I was a theatre porter at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital but I'm an engineer by trade. I've always earned my living with my hands, and this is totally different but it's good fun, especially as I'm a people person.

"Ironically I do more hours volunteering than I did when I finished up working but I love it and have no intention of stopping at the moment. As long as the NHS is still vaccinating, I'll keep going whilst I'm fit and able to!"