

When the Covid pandemic hit in March 2020, Communications Equipment Project Manager at Cambridgeshire Fire & Rescue Service, Nicky Hoad was on maternity leave.

Here the 39-year-old explains how a combination of feeling isolated at home and a desire to do something to help the nation get through the pandemic spurred her into joining Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust's (CCS) vaccination team.

"In January 2021, I was feeling really isolated working from home and frustrated that the pandemic seemed to be going on and on, so when the opportunity came up to help with the vaccination programme I jumped at the chance for my own sanity as it meant I could have a bit of interaction with people and also because I wanted to play a part in helping us get out the other side.

"I started off stewarding at Peterborough City Care Centre which involved booking people in, showing them to the vaccination pods and wiping down chairs.

"A while later, Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) brought together a group of us who were interested in becoming volunteer vaccinators and organised for St John Ambulance and the Red Cross to train us which was great!

"Once I'd been trained up, I did a few shifts at Peterborough City Care Centre before moving to the Oak Tree Centre where I've been doing 2/3 shifts a month, mainly at weekends.

"Initially I found vaccinating quite nerve-racking but it's like riding a bike, once you find your groove and you do a few, it's really good.

"Everybody has been so grateful. Most people will always say 'thank you so much for what you're doing, we really appreciate it!', and that's nice.

"The teams I've worked with have been absolutely brilliant and really good fun. A lot of people joined the vaccination programme after being furloughed, so I've met and worked with many different people who I'd probably never have come across and certainly wouldn't have ever worked with under normal circumstances!

"In the early days when we were vaccinating the elderly folk, many hadn't left their homes for months, so it was very rewarding to be giving them a vaccine that would enable them to get out of their house and return to some semblance of normality.

"In terms of challenges, I think sometimes when people are scared and apprehensive, they can get quite defensive, and I've had people who didn't want to wear a mask and others who were convinced there was a micro chip in the vaccine or that they were being forced to do it. I've also vaccinated several people with needle phobias, so there have been a range of challenges to overcome but you learn as you go along, and I've always felt well supported by the rest of the vaccination team.

"In my day job, I'm used to dealing with lots of different people and this came in handy whilst working at the vaccination sites. On top of this, I used to work in the control centre and was a first responder, so I have experience of keeping people calm and alleviating their worries.

"If anyone else is considering volunteering, my advice would be to one hundred percent go for it!

"I'm really grateful to have been given the opportunity to be part of the vaccination programme and thankful to CFRS and my family for their support too.

“In February 2022, I was offered a paid role vaccinating with the NHS and I’m currently undergoing training to vaccinate children which will be a new challenge.

“I’ve always had a massive respect for the NHS, but this has certainly enhanced it!”