



The Nailsea District Leg Club: the importance of a volunteer team

Leg Clubs are a partnership between the local community and the health service, where leg care is provided by NHS nurses within a social 'club' environment. Local volunteers help to establish each Leg Club and to raise funds to support their Club.

Today, there are 44 Leg Clubs in the UK: each Leg Club is unique, addressing the needs of the local community, but all follow the psychosocial framework model of care. The Club cares for those with leg problems, particularly leg ulcers. The clinical service is delivered by local clinical teams. Alongside, and just as vital, a team of volunteers provides conversation, refreshments and interaction, thereby helping reduce social isolation, which is very common in those experiencing lower limb problems. Delivering the service in the community rather than a medical setting de-medicalises the condition and avoids the passive concept of a 'sick patient'.

A volunteer partnership in modern society

The Nailsea District Leg Club meets every Wednesday morning in Nailsea Tithe Barn and regularly sees 20–24 members (patients) a week. The Leg Club has a large team of volunteers who undertake a wide variety of roles both during the Wednesday morning sessions as well as outside of the Leg Club itself. But all have one vital thing in common—they genuinely care for Leg Club members. And, in doing so, they completely understand and engage in the Leg Club model. This gives equal importance to the social aspect, as it compliments the holistic assessment and clinical treatment Club members receive. The volunteers understand the importance of the fact that interaction between members and volunteers directly links to an improvement in health and wellbeing.

At the Nailsea District Leg Club, there are four categories of volunteers: general, nurse support worker, driver and organisational (committee). Although each category has specific and different roles, they interact with each other in order to provide a positive overall experience for Leg Club members. Each volunteer group understands the devastation of being socially isolated and helps members integrate back into community life, making them feel valued as part of the Leg Club. Members enjoy talking about their

life experiences and previous work, their partners and family and how they fill their days. The volunteers are genuinely interested in the individual and get to know them well over the weeks and months that the member comes to the Leg Club.

Even within the general category, there are a variety of roles to be undertaken. For example, the receptionists form the frontline 'meet and greet' team: from their first warm welcome as members arrive, a connection is made. They ensure members are seen in turn as efficiently as possible and organise for any new members to be allocated a volunteer to help them complete any necessary forms. It can be a little daunting turning up to any new service for the first time, and the reception process ensures new members are made to feel comfortable as quickly as possible. A *What is a Leg Club* leaflet is provided to every new member, enabling them to understand the volunteer's role. During registration, a new member also receives a specially designed The Leg Club Handbook and information related to lower limb care. Other general volunteers make refreshments for the members, volunteers, nurses and visitors. Hot and cold drinks are provided, considering the individual's needs, such as decaffeinated drinks and—the members' favourite bit—cake, biscuits and fruit! One of the volunteers makes homemade cakes and rock buns whenever she is at the Leg Club, and they go down very well with everyone.

All volunteers make time to chat with the members. This seems a simple act, but it is such a vital part of the Leg Club model and impacts members positively, helping them reconnect with the community if they have been isolated. The Leg Club provides a social gathering for volunteers two or three times per year, which is excellent for team building, and is always well attended, indicating their enthusiasm for the role. Many also give more of their time outside of Leg Club to help with fund-raising activities and promotional events. For instance, the Nailsea Leg Club recently attended an annual international bike show in a local pub. Information stands were set up, and volunteers shared leaflets and spoke to many people about the Leg Club model and the importance of lower limb care.

The Nailsea Leg Club's volunteer drivers are amazing. Theirs is certainly not just a taxi service: they know each individual member and what their particular needs are in terms of restricted mobility. They are respectful of the mobility aids that may be needed and understand members' dependency on them. They arrive at the Leg Club joking and laughing with the members, carrying their handbags or notes, taking as much time as is needed and providing a helpful arm to lean on if needed. They pick members up and drop them home, right to the front door and even into their houses if necessary. They definitely go the extra mile to ensure the safety and care of each person—and have such fun doing it.

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An important addition to the volunteer team is nurses—some who remain on the register and others who are no longer registered or who have retired. Their role is defined as volunteer nurse support workers (NSWs), and they contribute by sharing their experience and skills in an advisory capacity. They support the (award winning!) clinical team at the Nailsea District Leg Club and, under its direction, undertake simple duties to help members who are waiting to be seen and treated. As the majority of NSWs are retired clinicians, their listening skills are put to good use, and members often share information they perhaps would not with the general volunteer. The procedure of washing a member's legs is an important part of the Leg Club framework, as it is perceived as a therapeutic, noninvasive, holistic intervention designed to promote wellbeing and healing. Simultaneously, the volunteer or clinician communicates with the member using touch, and simply washing the person's leg creates a sense of normality by enabling members to soak their legs in a lined bucket of warm water. Having the legs washed and creamed is quite an intimate process—but the NSWs undertake their work while adhering to manual handling guidelines with the dignity and comfort of the member in mind.

And last, but certainly not the least, is the Leg Club management committee, whose members' variety of life and work skills and experience come together to help the group manage the Leg Club to a professional standard. The nurse lead attends committee meetings to ensure that the nursing activities are represented and taken into account. Of course, the Leg Club is dependent on the local GP surgery and community nurse provider to release the nurses to work at the Leg Club each week, and so it is imperative that communication is given high priority. The volunteer lead, formerly a registered nurse, hospital manager and registration inspection officer with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), co-ordinates the volunteer diary to ensure adequate cover each week, in addition to inducting new volunteers, producing protocols for every activity and arranging regular training sessions on subjects such as safeguarding. She also organises the drivers' rota: members are matched to drivers to enable the smooth running of each collection—this gives each member confidence in and reassures them about the service.

The Leg Club's secretary takes and produces minutes as well as sorting out any other correspondence, and the treasurer, who has a bookkeeping background, keeps the Club financially viable! As this community Leg Club is self-funded, her management of finances is needed to make sure income and expenditure are carefully controlled. The Club also has someone who is responsible for public relations, as maintaining a high profile in the community is very important to encourage those who may need to attend the Leg Club for advice and/or treatment. The author's role as chair, with a retired practice manager background, involves applying for grants and organising fund-raising events where needed. Her former leadership skills help to meld this wonderful group of people together as it works to make the Leg Club the very best service it can be. All volunteer members of the managing committee are 'hands-on', working regularly at the Leg Club so that they can engage in how the evidence-based model framework works, understand where the challenges lie and devise possible solutions to any problems that arise.

Partnerships between health and social care and third-sector organisations have evolved in the private and primary health sectors, with an aim to provide an effective, seamless service that meets the needs of the local populations. An example of this is the third-sector–corporate partnership that has been forged between the Foundation and the Healthcare Leg Club Industry Partners (LCIP) (Lindsay, 2018). This partnership gives companies the opportunity to play an active role within the Foundation and Leg Club network. The Nailsea District Leg Club benefits from this partnership, as LCIP field representatives adhering to their LCIP code of conduct attend the Club regularly, providing excellent support to the volunteers, members and clinical team. It is an interactive process, as they get to know all people involved in the Leg Club team and are always prepared to help. Their inputs and support are invaluable in ensuring enhanced care collectively.

Conclusion

It is clear that each group of volunteers deserves recognition for the outstanding commitment and support they provide week on week. Volunteers also lend a hand to those who may need social support while providing activities that keep the mind alert, the body moving and bringing purpose to what can otherwise be long, empty days for many members.

Members' feedback highlights the value of the service, and as chair, the author is incredibly proud to be involved with such an inspirational team.

Testimonials from Nailsea District Leg Club members:

'I live on my own and this means that sometimes I get a little lonely and isolated and I get in a lower frame of mind. When I come to the Leg Club, this puts me in a high frame of mind. I like to speak to other people and learn about their life experiences and their life events, like what they did a week before. This gives me a sense of perspective.'

'I would like to do something to advertise the Leg Clubs and the wonderful work that they are doing.'

'In the past, the Leg Club did not have any drivers, and members had to make their own way to the Clubs. I used to either walk or take a bus. But the buses have since changed their routes quite a lot. I now use the Leg Club drivers, who call me the night before to confirm that they will be picking me up. And I am always picked up at 9 am.'

Volunteers' quotes:

'We get something out of it, too. After I stopped working, I didn't want to take a full-time job. I do the Leg Club now; it gets me out of the house, and it means I am doing something for other people rather than sitting at home and doing things for myself.'

'I never claim on the mileage with the Leg Club ... because they work for a just cause.'

Leg Club Conference update

In line with Government guidance, the 2020 annual Leg Club conference has been cancelled and will instead take place on 29–30 September 2021. For more information, visit the website: <https://www.legclub.org/>. **CWC**

Lindsay E. Monitoring service quality: Lindsay Leg Club member satisfaction survey. *Br J Community Nurs.* 2018; 23(12): S24–S28. <https://doi.org/10.12968/bjcn.2018.23.Sup12.S24>