Regional Development Forum Roundup

It's amazing how quickly the AGM and conference come around. I hope that everyone attending gets some useful things to support workstreams and personal development. Conference planning has been pretty much a constant for the Exec since early last Summer and I think contains some topical and relevant sessions for people to absorb and enjoy.

It's brilliant to see how active regional groups are. The membership report has shown overall member numbers decreasing slightly from 170 in Feb 2025 to 161 in Feb 2026, thought some of this has been down to some overdue data cleansing.

I'd like to thank fellow members of the Exec and the Regional Reps who hold these roles in voluntary capacities in addition to their day jobs. Everyone is helping to drive the Network forward in such a positive way. If anybody is interested in an Exec or Regional Rep role, please grab one of us and we'll be happy to talk things through.

Following the conference, a survey will go out to you for feedback. Please do complete this fully and honestly as its vital for shaping what the conference offer looks like in 2027.

Below, you will find a summary of regional activities and discussion points throughout the last 12 months. I hope you find these informative too.

Steve Bond
Regional Development Forum Chair

Northwest Region - Ian Turnbull

In the Northwest HVMN, there are 22 members representing 22 hospices, all run in different ways which beings a huge depth and breadth of ideas and sharing to the meetings.

This year a total of two face-to-face meetings have taken place in various hospices across the Northwest. Our meetings always have a lively exchange of sharing ideas and insights, from a wide range of hospices.

On average, between 10 and 15 members have attended each meeting. It's not just a meeting; it's sharing information and advice. It's our version of clinical supervision, a unique blend of professional discourse and genuine camaraderie.

A wide range of topics have been discussed including:
Many topics have been discussed including making volunteers feel valued, especially during festive season, Volunteers Week, and beyond. We have asked the question should DBS checks extend to volunteers in retail and non-hospice areas?
The agendas have covered mandatory training, volunteer statistics, corporate volunteers, and the constant watch over safeguarding training. Also discussed have been volunteer recruitment, the presence of students in the actual hospice, and the age-old debate on the minimum age limit within hospice walls, volunteers computer management systems, differing volunteer roles and our own work loads.

The world of DBS checks for shop supervisors working with the under-18's, U18's risk assessments and the ongoing discussions around Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.
We also have a robust round robin email circulation for any immediate questions.

South Region – Emma Lemm

The southern region has met 3 times during the period, all meetings now have the option for members to attend either in-person or via Teams. There are currently 23 members.
Our meetings are structured so that participants share their Headaches, Highlights and Horizons allowing time in the second half of the meeting to discuss any challenges raised.

Topics covered:

- Hospice funding – impact on hospices / services
- Recognition / Thank you events
- Volunteer management systems – decision making around which system / funding
- Recruitment challenges, in particular retail and weekend coverage
- Mandatory training and delivery methods
- Corporate volunteers – who manages, engages these volunteers
- Retention of records
- Mass recruitment – opening megastores / pressures on teams to recruit alongside business as usual
- Trustee recruitment and appraisal
- Driving checks on fundraising vol drivers

South West Region – Sarah-Jayne Fell

The SWR currently has 19 active members which is slightly down on the previous years.
We have met twice virtually since the last conference and discussed an array of topics. The repercussions of last years funding issues have still plagued some hospices, whilst others have used the situation to gather momentum from their local communities.
Hospice grounds:
Back when Govt announced that they were investing £100m into hospices, it of course came with the caveat that it was to be spent on capital and not staffing. For some in our region they were not even eligible for that funding, which as part of our conversations, showed a huge amount of inequality across the region for patients and families, between the hospices who had and those who did not.
Some hospices had the opportunity to turn this capital investment into positive restructuring, for example upgrading and renovating the existing spaces to help staff feel more connected and patients and visitors more central to practises instead of being spread across several sites.
Other hospices, who had land and/or buildings no longer required, were able to use the money to renovate, sell and invest without any further restraints. It was agreed, that for those who received it, the inventive and creative ways in which the money has been used has had positive outcomes, but these often came with lengthy plans that took away from our core focus. For those not receiving anything or very little, it of course has little to no effect.

Recruitment of volunteers:
Generally, hospices in our region have seen little change to the way in which their volunteering programmes have changed, which is a positive. What has become evident, however, is that

when services are stretched, volunteers are leant on more and more to plug the gap which often leads to frustration and of course is not sustainable.
For some hospices, merging departments and streamlining roles has meant a resurgence in defining the difference between paid employment and volunteering, meaning that the recruitment and onboarding process has again been highlighted in what type of language is used. For example, the use of application form or expression of interest form, interview vs informal chat and Job role vs role description. During our catch ups, we have also discussed the positives, the limitations and the minefield of implementation of clinical volunteering roles within the hospice setting and have asked that the spotlight on this type of volunteering features in future conferences, as the need for it seems to be increasing.

Training and onboarding:
Training remains a hot topic in our catch ups. Whilst all hospices work within the framework of ensuring all staff and volunteers are adequately trained, there is still much anxiety around just what needs to be included, when and how frequently.
Such training like Oliver McGowan course is required for all patient rolls, but the access and implementation of this has been difficult for some. This just one example, and there are other areas, such as transporting patients with oxygen, that have yet to have a collective approach on best practise to train and record. Each hospice seems to manage to the training as and when they can ensure the bare minimum is reached as quickly as possible. More opportunities to train closer together and share resources was suggested as a way of lightening the load.
Generally, volunteering is felt to be in a good place with much of the region reporting that volunteers are happy and content with their roles and the support they receive. Whilst some hospices are in the process of updating their management systems, volunteers report feeling a good sense of connection with those responsible for them, seeing the updating of software as an investment in them.

The plan is to try and have a face-to-face in the summer to reflect on some of the points raised so far, and those that come out of conference.

Midlands Region – Sam Squire & Julia Lowe

2025 marked a period of transition for the Midlands region, with a number of longstanding members departing the hospice sector following organisational restructures. This period of change also included Toby Mobberley stepping down from his role as Regional Rep in June. In response, Julia Lowe from Dougie Mac and Sam Squire from Rainbows stepped forward, taking on joint responsibility for the Regional Rep position. This allowed for an opportunity to reinvigorate the regional meetings and better establish connections between members.
We have also welcomed several new members to the region – some as a result of the expansion of existing volunteering teams; others due the creation of a dedicated volunteering team within their organisation.

Over the last 12 months, the region has held 4 meetings, including one in-person meeting hosted at Rainbows in Loughborough. Despite the period of transition and change, meeting attendance has remained strong, with 50-75% of members joining each meeting; and nearly all members joining at least one meeting over the course of the year. This demonstrates the valuable role HVMN continues to play in supporting the sector, and the value members place on remaining connected to their peers.

Beyond the scheduled quarterly meetings, ongoing communication and support between members has been strong. Queries and questions have been shared via email between meetings, enabling ad-hoc discussion and collaboration. This flexible approach to engagement has been met with enthusiasm, prompting the region to begin establishing a WhatsApp group for members. This idea aims to further strengthen the sense of connection and support between members, especially in such a large geographical region.

Topics for discussion have included:

- **Reinvigorating the regional meetings** following the appointment of new Regional Reps.
- **Investing in Volunteers Accreditation** – informing best practice, sharing experiences of accreditation process, the value of such standards and accreditation.
- **Volunteer Drivers** – Health & safety, vetting, training, sharing good practice.
- **Volunteer Ambassadors** – engagement volunteers within fundraising teams, service users sharing experiences, stewardship challenges.
- **Problem solving processes** – discussing and sharing different approaches between different organisations
- **CRM/VMS providers** – a regular and recurring topic: sharing experiences of different software packages, tips for implementing, shared challenges.
- **Volunteering training** – LMS providers, frequency and amount of training, delivery methods, safeguarding training.
- **How volunteers can contribute beyond their volunteer role** – which sparked an interesting and varied discussion, ranging from how to ask and record such information to the importance of forming effective relationships, and then went onto to include the ethics of doing this and not asking too much of volunteers; and then brought together by consensus that volunteers can act as important champions/cheerleaders for your organisation in their local community.

North East Region – Charlotte Hagarty

The North East group has 19 members and meets on line each quarter. We have had 3 meetings over the last 12 months. The meeting attendance varies between 5 – 12 people. Members also interact using the distribution list which is used to share ideas and ask for support, which has been really useful.
Each meeting the Chairs will ask for agenda items and guest speakers are invited if applicable.
In the last year discussions have covered:
Feedback to members who could not attend the conference, DBS discussions, retail recruitment, volunteer management systems, and communicating with volunteers.
We have recently set up a whats app group as well to support regional members.

Scotland Region – Eileen Ashford

It has been over 7 months since we have met in person/zoomed but we continue to be active on the email and we have welcomed St Margaret's Hospice to the group.

Hospices is Scotland like the rest of the UK continue to be affected by financial issues. Scottish Hospices have been awarded £9.4m which may go some way to alleviate some financial pain for us all PVGs in continue to be a hot topic with new rules coming into affect from 1 April

which will see all of us having to ensure our volunteers' PVG are renewed very 5 years (there are various transitional steps which means that we will not all have to re-apply at once)

London & North West Thames Region – Su Bennett & Jenn Bird

Over the past year, the region has continued to operate successfully using a hybrid meeting model. Attendance has varied depending on location, with a consistent mix of in-person and online participation. This approach has enabled broad engagement and ensured that members across the region can remain connected and involved.
As we do not currently have a designated regional representative, the group continues to rotate responsibilities for chairing, hosting, and minute taking. This shared model has now been in place for several years and remains effective, giving all members the opportunity to contribute and lead. The group meets approximately three to four times a year, with regular communication maintained through email when hospices require support or advice on specific issues.

Key Topics Discussed During the Year

- Approaches to volunteer training and the development of training for staff who manage volunteers.
- Probationary processes for volunteers and how hospice's structure early support.
- Volunteer risk assessments and the creation of tailored support plans.
- DBS checks, update processes, and challenges around compliance.
- Recruitment trends, volunteer numbers, and strategies to attract new volunteers.
- Volunteer surveys, recognition events, and methods for strengthening engagement.
- Trustee recruitment and governance considerations.
- Issues arising within retail volunteering teams.
- Organisational restructures and the financial pressures influencing volunteer services.

Changes in Group Membership

This year has seen some movement within the group. One long-standing member has transferred to another region to align with her hospice's geographical area. Another member has left following redundancy, and we have been unable to make contact with a further colleague who may also be affected by organisational change. These shifts reflect the wider instability currently being experienced across the sector.

Pressures Affecting Hospices and Volunteering Teams

The group remains acutely aware of the significant economic pressures facing many hospices. This theme has been a recurring part of our discussions, particularly in relation to:

- Increasing expectations placed on volunteering teams as hospices restructure or reduce paid roles.
- The challenge of maintaining volunteer support when staff capacity is stretched.
- Concerns about sustaining volunteer engagement during periods of organisational uncertainty.
- The emotional impact on volunteers when services change or when staff they know are made redundant.

Members have also highlighted the need to balance operational demands with the wellbeing of volunteers, ensuring that volunteers are not asked to step into roles beyond their remit or comfort level.

East Region – Jemma Wood

No update at this time