

**VOLUNTEERING** **MATTERS**

**Healthlink** 



# **Healthlink Impact Report** **2023-24**

The impact of the Healthlink Service in Brighton & Hove, since it was restarted post-covid in 2023.

Healthlink supports people to health and wellbeing appointments, and is delivered by the Lifelines project, which has been supporting people in the city since 2007.

# What is Lifelines?

**Lifelines** has been supporting people over 50 in Brighton & Hove since 2007. A city full of energy, diversity and heart - our work here is all about supporting people to live healthier more connected lives, helping to tackle loneliness and isolation.

We recruit, train and support volunteers to start and run groups that bring people together to exercise, create, try new things and get together - focussing on social connections, health and having fun.

We started **Healthlink** in 2012 as a way to support those same people to attend vital health and wellbeing appointments when they are no longer able to rely on friends or family.

## How Healthlink works

Health appointments are crucial for staying well – physically, mentally and emotionally, but getting there can be stressful or overwhelming, especially when you are alone. Whether it's a GP visit, hospital check-up, dentist appointment, or even a wellbeing group, it's easier with the help of friendly, trained volunteers to offer support and encouragement.

Healthlink volunteers meet people at home and accompany them to their appointment - on foot, by bus, taxi or patient transport. They can wait outside during the visit or go in to remind people of questions they want to ask - and they can take notes to leave with them after they return home. This service helps people attend more of their health appointments and helps to reduce the impact of missed appointments.

Our service supports any city resident aged over 50, and many of those that we support have a wide range of health issues including complex long term health conditions.



# Our Impact

Our Healthlink volunteers supported people to dentists, GPs, nurses, hospital outpatients, physio recovery walks, shops, and social and wellbeing activities.

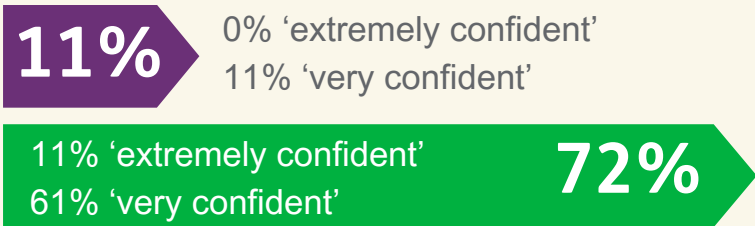


**13** volunteers supported **21** beneficiaries to **82** health and wellbeing appointments



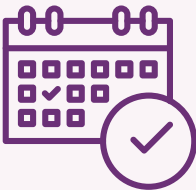
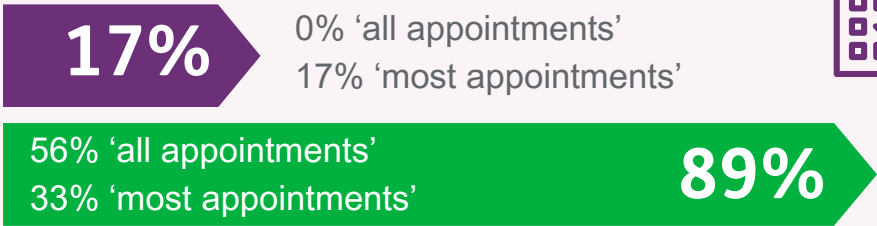
## Beneficiaries confidence about attending health or wellbeing appointments...

**before** getting volunteer support  
**after** getting volunteer support



## Beneficiaries on how many of their health or wellbeing appointments they could attend...

**before** getting volunteer support  
**after** getting volunteer support



## Beneficiaries on how likely they were to recommend Healthlink

**after** getting volunteer support



*Responses taken from a survey of 18 Healthlink Beneficiaries  
November to December 2024.*



# Case Study:

## Patching Lodge

Patching Lodge is local senior housing scheme with extra care, managed by Anchor. Our Lifelines volunteers deliver group activities there for residents and locals, so we are familiar with the quality of care they deliver to their residents and are aware of the struggles that they face.

Caroline Carter, a support worker there, has referred several residents for Healthlink support, and she talked to us about one that had been diagnosed with dementia and cataract issues.



**Caroline Carter**  
Support Worker

“Unfortunately, he didn’t have any family or anyone who was able to take him to appointments. The main problem we had is his cataracts were getting very bad and because he couldn’t see, he was missing appointments because he couldn’t read the letters. We got to the stage where he’d come out of the system, so by the time we got him back in both eyes were really bad. He was nearly blind. He used to go out quite a bit on his own but he wasn’t really going out because he couldn’t see very well. He had a couple of falls when he’s been out because obviously, he can’t see the pavements. It was really, really quite bad.”

It has been absolutely invaluable for him having somebody to take him and we’ve been very lucky in that the volunteer that we’ve had has been brilliant. She said that she would go with the resident for all of his appointments so he had the same person going so he got to know her. She was really kind with him and we kept that continuity going. He ended up having his operation, she went with him and waited with him and brought him back and it was a great success. It’s absolutely life-changing because like I say, it was affecting him. I can’t speak highly enough of the Healthlink volunteer and the whole system. It has worked brilliantly for him.

He had the same person taking him to his appointments and eventual operation. Familiarity can build trust, which can be important during a tough experience that someone has to go through.

As for the resident, after one eye had been treated, he was freely walking about in the social areas and was quite talkative.

**“I can’t speak highly enough of the Healthlink volunteer and the whole system. It has worked brilliantly for him.”**  
- Caroline Carter,  
Support Worker

# Case Study:

## Leach Court

Leach Court is a council senior housing scheme, where again our Lifelines volunteers deliver group activities for residents and locals.

Scheme Manager, Tracy Boegli-Taylor, spoke to us about some of her residents and the struggles trying to support people who don't have a friend or family group to help them.

“ We have one resident here who I referred to you to take him to appointments because he was missing appointments. His health was declining, and he wasn't retaining the information he got when he was there. For me, supporting him as the manager of where he lives, it was quite difficult as because I couldn't really gauge what was going on.

Your volunteer took him to the appointment, and they could feedback to me important information. They also encouraged him to go to groups because he's very lonely. I think it's just him knowing that someone was there to support him about what was happening, he was really grateful, so happy to have someone to be with him. I think it just makes him feel valued that someone really cares about what happens, because he doesn't have any relatives, any family.

**Tracy Boegli-Taylor**, Scheme Manager



“ Just having somebody with me because my family can't come to anything like that because they are working and can't take time off work to do that sort of thing. So having support there to help with the mobility, getting in and out of a taxi and that sort of thing. And to give me more confidence that I had somebody at my back.

Also to help with the remembering. I couldn't always remember what had been said to me and some of it was important about what I should be doing to help myself. The volunteer was taking notes of what the medical professional was saying to me, which I probably would have forgotten most of it when I got back home and that was a help.

**Healthlink Beneficiary**

# Case Study:

## Recovery Walks

A charity social prescriber referred a woman in her 70s they thought could benefit from our Healthlink Service. The beneficiary used to be very independent, but was temporarily living in a care home and needing physiotherapist support to regain her independence.

Their family do not live locally and so she was desperately looking for someone to provide support on short walks around the neighbourhood. She has a walking stick and just needed someone to be there in case she needed help, or an arm for support.

*“Amazing. I am so delighted she is getting the support she so needs and deserves. I really appreciate your support.”*

**- Beneficiary's Physiotherapist**

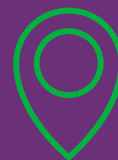


We matched two volunteers willing to support her and from December 2023 to April 2024 they supported 9 walks. One of the volunteers that supported her was Helen, a retired NHS worker who moved to Brighton a couple of years ago.

*“I supported her initially for 6 weeks and and we instantly bonded over our love of the outdoors and good novels which resulted in the local walks going so quickly. As the weeks flew by Lifeline's were happy for me to continue supporting her in the better weather. I was able to make her aware of the library visiting service, and that Lifelines could support her with hospital or GP appointments in the future.”*

I was really sad to say goodbye to her at the end of the 3-month period. I had learnt the names of many plants and in return she had plenty of book recommendations from me. I feel very lucky to have met and supported her, in her determination to get outside and keep as physically strong as possible for as long as possible.”

**Helen Snowden**, Healthlink Volunteer





# What our Beneficiaries say



“ I have family that live further way from me and can't always be there to help with appointments so to have someone available since I have trouble with speech, mobility and confidence since my stroke. The volunteers have been a huge help to me and also put my family's minds at rest that I have someone there.



“ It really is necessary for those who are older and need support. It gives people a lot of confidence.

“ Absolutely vital service for people that don't have anyone, and can't attend appointments without these volunteers. If Healthlink wasn't there, it would be awful.

“ I am always nervous about appointments but my first experience with a volunteer was very good. They put me at ease when there were problems and issues with the appointment, and were kind and gentle and very patient with me. I hope they be around for long long while as this support is needed for people like me.



“ Healthlink is an invaluable service, which has made a big difference to me. Volunteers are friendly, helpful and capable. They are punctual and sometimes go beyond the call of duty. If it was not for this service I would not be able to attend important health appointments. Thank you Healthlink!

“ Halves the burden if you can share it with someone who understands you. You come out of it with a feeling of return, like you can talk to someone and they help you know what to do.

“ Very pleased with the help I can get. It gives me confidence, I'm very nervous and I get agitated but the support really helps me.



# Next Steps and Challenges

When we restarted our Healthlink service post-Covid, we were initially referred to by senior housing schemes that we had a working relationship with and social prescribers from charities we worked alongside in supporting older.

We are now being contacted directly by GP surgeries and health clinics, and meeting this increase in demand will be a big priority in 2025. We have now recruited an Engagement Manager to manage the Healthlink service and help it to grow.

## Our main focus in 2025

- We were unable to support to 15 beneficiary appointments because of volunteer capacity, so we are focussing on recruiting more volunteers to support our increasing list of beneficiaries.
- Whilst the majority of travel is by bus or walking, there are times where a vehicle is needed. We plan to expand our service so that volunteer drivers can support beneficiaries to these appointment where possible. This would cut the reliance on the patient transport service which would considerably reduce travel times. This would also further support those beneficiaries who struggle to cover their transport costs to attend appointments.

## A huge thank you to all our volunteers!

### Contact us



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[volunteeringmatters.org.uk/healthlink](https://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/healthlink)

Get in touch to find out more about Healthlink, how to refer for support, or how to become a volunteer.

Healthlink is part of Lifelines, a project that has been supporting those over 50 in Brighton & Hove since 2007, run by national charity Volunteering Matters.



We are grateful to be supported by players of the People's Postcode Lottery

