

## My wonderful week of volunteering

I've just completed a week volunteering with Mires Beck, which was made possible due to the NHS England and Improvement's Volunteering policy, which allows staff time off to volunteer for a charity. I'm a carer and I really appreciated a break from home during my week of volunteering and realised the nursery also gives family carers similar respite.

My first two days were spent working with Pauline and the Perennials Team, inside a glass house, potting on plants from 9cm pots into 3 litre pots. I got through a lot of compost and became quite quick, improving from completing 95 plants to 155 the next day.

Even when I was planting out 'Pyracantha', a plant which is very spikey and not something I particularly like (although I have it in my garden), I appreciated its healthy roots when potting it on. I really took notice of my surroundings; the geese, sheep and birds. Working in an outdoors environment was a pure joy.



*Inside one of the glass houses*

I spent a day with the trees and wildflowers team, this time working outside with Steve and meeting other volunteers, Caroline and John. The initial task of making root trainers was very repetitive, so I was pleased to be able to move onto potting on plants from the wildflowers section.



*Working outside in the woods*

Working outdoors, in a physically-demanding role, is the complete opposite of my normal desk-based job at NHS England and Improvement, where I work as part of a national public participation team.

I clocked up 20,000 steps daily and at the end of each day I felt exhausted, but in a positive way. I felt my volunteering was extremely worthwhile and it gave me a good insight into how important it is to have adequately resourced day service facilities as well as employment support, for vulnerable adults.



*The woodland walk*

My week ended working with Lizzie in the potting shed with Catherine and Howard, making each plant look its best, cutting off dead leaves and weeding the compost.



*Plant orders ready for collection*

I had a wonderful week. I have a much better understanding of the support given to families and adults with learning difficulties and the contribution of green therapy.

We all want the opportunity to feel valued and appreciated and this is something Mires Beck provided in abundance. I made new friends and gained the benefits of working outdoors, feeling mindful and relaxed.



*My empty trolley and potted-up plants in the nursery*

I'm a Friend of Mires Beck and thoroughly encourage anyone who is thinking about volunteering to give it a go. I was made to feel extremely welcome and had a fantastic time. I'm looking forward to returning next year. I can't recommend volunteering enough and thanks to NHS England and Improvement for giving me this wonderful opportunity and to Mires Beck for welcoming me.

Rachael Mather