

Bridge Builders Programme

Information for patients

What are Bridge Builders?

Bridge Builders are volunteers who can accompany you to your outpatient appointment if you need extra support to attend.

The programme is inspired by a successful and thriving model in Denmark where volunteer support has helped many people feel more confident and at ease during their healthcare journey.

Why is this support needed?

Attending appointments can sometimes feel stressful or overwhelming, especially if you are unsure of where to go or what to expect. You might feel more at ease having someone else with you. Bridge Builder volunteers offer a reassuring presence and practical help to guide you through your visit. This support can be helpful if:

- You are attending an appointment alone and would prefer some company
- You have had a difficult experience attending or trying to attend appointments in the past.
- You feel unsure about where to go or how to get to the right place
- You would benefit from talking things through before or after your appointment to help you feel more confident.

How can a Bridge Builder volunteer help you?

A Bridge Builder volunteer can provide support in many ways. They can:

- Meet you on-site before your appointment
- Help you find your way around the hospital if you are unsure where to go
- Be a calm, friendly presence before and after your appointment
- Sit in the appointment with you and act as an “extra pair of ears”. This is completely optional, and you can ask them to step out at any time
- Spend some time after your appointment to talk things through ensuring your understanding of next steps.

What Bridge Builders don't do

Bridge Builders are volunteers and do not replace professional care. They do not:

- Give medical advice
- Speak on your behalf or make decisions for you
- Provide personal care
- Assist with manual handling (e.g. support in and out of a wheelchair)
- Provide transport or financial support.
- Offer counselling.

They are there to support you and help you feel more confident and at ease during your appointment.

Who are the volunteers?

Bridge Builders are volunteers who are studying for a career in healthcare. They are compassionate, motivated individuals who want to make a difference in people's healthcare experiences.

All Bridge Builder volunteers complete mandatory training and attend ongoing supervision. They are trained and supervised by NHS Lothian staff within the Voluntary Services Team and Medical Education Directorate.

Volunteers are members of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme and abide by NHS confidentiality and data protection policies.

How to get support from a Bridge Builder

You don't have to go through your healthcare journey alone. Bridge Builders are there to walk alongside you and offer a friendly, reassuring presence every step of the way.

If you think you would benefit from having a Bridge Builder volunteer accompany you to your outpatient appointment, please get in touch by either:

- Speaking to your healthcare professional (e.g. Doctor, Nurse etc.) and asking them to refer you.
- Calling or emailing us directly to refer yourself. Contact details can be found below.

Once referred, a member of the Voluntary Services Team will call you to complete a short telephone assessment. This is a friendly conversation to explain how the programme works, understand your needs and make sure the support we offer is right for you. All information provided will be handled in line with NHS Lothians data protection and confidentiality policies.

We will aim to match you with a suitable volunteer based on your appointment time, location and any specific needs or preferences you have shared. A member of the team will confirm the details with you in advance of your appointment.

If we do not have a volunteer available at the time of your appointment, we will let you and your healthcare professional know as soon as possible. You are welcome to refer yourself again for future appointments and we will do our best to offer support when a volunteer is available.

Useful contacts

Bridge Builders Programme

Telephone: 07484 994 286

Please leave your full name and contact telephone number.

Email: loth.bridgebuilders.nhs.scot

NHS Lothian Hospital Switchboard

Telephone: 0131 536 1000

Let them know which hospital you want to be transferred to, once connected ask for your outpatient department.

Patient Experience Team

Telephone: 0131 536 3370

Email: loth.feedback.nhs.scot