

Putting a spotlight on the Lindsay Leg Club volunteers



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The Lindsay Leg Club network is an innovative approach to community-based ongoing provision of social support, education, empowerment and leg care to adults of all ages. The Leg Clubs operate as partnerships between people with, or at the risk of, developing problems with their legs (known as 'members'), healthcare professionals, Leg Club Industry Partners (LCIP) and volunteers – individuals, many of whom are retired, with time and skills to give to their local community. Leg Club volunteers form a committee, which organises and runs the Leg Club in collaboration with the healthcare professionals. They play a fundamental role in securing a suitable venue for the Leg Club, create a fundraising committee to find the resources to pay for the venue and to provide refreshments and entertainment. In some Leg Clubs volunteers create other roles, such as PR specialists to disseminate Leg Club news or drivers to safely transport members between their homes and the Leg Clubs. This flexible environment gives the volunteers plenty of room to find creative ways of supporting their local community and space for the volunteers themselves to flourish through tapping into their existing professional skills, as well as cultivating new skills through collaboration.

INNOVATIVE EXPLORATION OF LINDSAY LEG CLUB VOLUNTEERING

To date, most studies conducted in the Leg Clubs have focused on members' experiences and satisfaction (Hampton, 2018; Lindsay, 2018; Bailey, 2019). Scholars have also analysed Leg Clubs with a focus on their effectiveness in the healthcare arena (Bawden et al, 2018; McIntyre et al, 2021). However, the volunteers have received less research attention. It was, therefore, important to zoom in specifically on this fundamental group of actors on the Leg Club arena. In spring and summer 2022, having researched Leg Clubs since 2018, I embarked on an exploration of the Lindsay Leg Club volunteering. I spoke to volunteers from three UK Leg Clubs to learn from their narratives about the experiences, priorities and challenges for the Leg Clubs as they were opening their doors after the COVID-19 pandemic related lockdowns. Given the significant

impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the society, it was especially important to understand how the experiences of Leg Club volunteers, as well as their perceptions of the key challenges and priorities for the future, have been influenced by the pandemic. The study was, therefore, innovative in at least two ways: firstly, because it put the spotlight on the volunteers and secondly, because it was the first to speak to the volunteers about how they felt the COVID-19 pandemic had affected them in their Leg Clubs to help us understand how volunteers can maintain their trajectory in delivering a social dimension to the Club in the post-COVID-19 world.

GROWING THE LEG CLUB VOLUNTEER NETWORK: WHAT THE VOLUNTEERS SAID

Just as the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our personal and professional lives, so too Leg Club volunteers have had continued concerns about the long-term capacity to return to the pre-pandemic levels of activity. Experiences across the three participating Leg Clubs were mixed, but the uniting objective expressed by all of them was the desire to recruit more volunteers.

What can be done to grow the network of Leg Club volunteers? An analysis of Leg Club volunteers' narratives suggested three possible avenues to increase the pool of potential volunteers:

- ▶ It is important that Leg Club volunteers who wish to contact and keep in touch with their peers from other Leg Clubs have easy-to-access communication channels to do so. Although some volunteers feel most comfortable communicating internally with other volunteers within their own Leg Club using email and phone, others have expressed an interest in both informal/ad-hoc and formalised/structured consultations with geographically distanced volunteers. The volunteers interviewed are aware of monthly email contact points with Lynn Bullock, the PA to the Founder and Lifetime President of the Lindsay Leg Club Foundation, Ellie Lindsay OBE, but other lateral communication channels could be explored.

It is essential to ensure that such channels do not replace existing provisions so as not to exclude anyone, but that they are clearly announced and marked as offering an addition to these provisions. It is also crucial to avoid any tensions that could come from the creation of any such new communication channels through making them entirely optional, respectful of individual freedoms and protective of volunteers' confidential personal information through data sharing.

- ▶ The Leg Clubs could consider whether, and if so, how, there could be an opportunity to bring younger individuals into the Leg Clubs to harness the potential of such collaborations to cross the inter-generational divide. Some Leg Club volunteers expressed an interest in coordinating visits from local schools, which would enable younger individuals to better understand elder people in their community and help educate younger groups about the life-long importance of maintaining leg health.
- ▶ Finally, while recognising the likely emotions of worry, stress, and anxiety about returning for health and social care to the collective, open, face-to-face Leg Club environment, the Leg Clubs need to take forward their ongoing activities aimed at recruiting more volunteers. This may include advertising in local health centres/surgeries, on community notice boards and community fairs. Social media advertising also has a role to play in this recruitment campaign,

even if such online campaigns might not reach all potential volunteers, who might not feel very technologically-savvy. However, undertaking publishing activities in local community print, online, radio and TV media might increase the visibility of the fantastic volunteering opportunity offered by the Leg Clubs.

SUMMARY

In addition to outlining what they see as the challenges and priorities for the Leg Clubs, the volunteers have been extremely generous in sharing their stories, explaining why they have joined the Leg Club and how they themselves have experienced the care and support they have been providing to others. At the time of writing, the data from the study are being analysed and the full results will be discussed in detail and published in due course, as well as presented at the upcoming 20th Annual Leg Club Conference in 2023.

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