

Karen Marsden

Karen Marsden was appointed Voluntary Services manager to Ashford Hospital at the end of the 1980s. In the last 21 years Karen has seen many changes, not least the merger of Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals and the extension of her role to include managing the growing army of volunteers on both Hospital sites. When Karen was appointed the role of the general volunteer in the NHS was still relatively new although hospitals were already very well served by organisations like the League of Friends and the WRVS. Karen took these organisations under her wing and developed a wider role for volunteers alongside these existing services. She has also contributed extensively at regional and national level to the development of the role of the Voluntary Services Manager, being largely responsible for a number of years for the organisation of their annual conferences as well as offering a great deal of individual support to her colleagues in other Trusts.

Karen will always have a unique place in the hearts of Ashford Hospital Staff. One of her yearly tasks was to support the League of Friends of Ashford Hospital in running the Summer Fete each year. Karen became synonymous with the fete. For weeks beforehand her office would be filled with goods to sell or raffle, games to play and bunting to decorate! Come rain or shine Karen would be there on the day, supporting every aspect of the event, and always, as on every occasion, being one of the last to leave because she always stayed behind to clear up!! Many of Karen's collection of photos feature the League of Friends – she was a member of the Friends Committee for many years, for much of that time working alongside Eric and Vi Molinari. Latterly she helped to support the transition between Eric's leadership and that of John Belstead. The Ashford Fete and other events brought Karen into close contact with Hospital Radio Wey and they too have benefited from her tireless support.

The number of volunteers at ASPH has grown steadily over the years. Despite that, Karen has taken a personal interest in the volunteers as individuals. Many have cause to be grateful to Karen for her care and concern during times of illness or through other personal difficulties. Karen has been consistent in her follow-through of volunteers and in the last few years has even represented the Trust at a number of funeral services for long-standing volunteers.

Karen is extremely self-effacing by nature and much prefers to be in the background, encouraging and enabling. She is an expert with a teapot! At the same time she is a consummate professional and she has been an excellent public ambassador for the Trust, engaging extensively with other voluntary agencies and also encouraging the involvement of local companies with the life of the Trust. Karen was instrumental, for example, in securing the services of Timberland in redeveloping some of the courtyard gardens at St. Peter's. One of Karen's legacies to us all will be the impetus she has given to the landscaping of many of the gardens around the Trust and she has seen her gardening volunteers win a number of awards for their work. Karen has served on the Trust "Patient First Steering Group" now the "Patient and Public Engagement Forum" and her knowledge both of the Trust and of the community we serve is invaluable.

Karen has also served over the years on the Trust Car Parking Group and on the Nutrition and Food Groups. She has possibly fielded more questions about car parking than anyone else in the Trust, with the exception of the Chief Executive. Her work with Carole Webster and some of the Ward Teams to set up the Patient Feeding Scheme was both pioneering and innovative. In time past Karen was also responsible for the stall holders who used daily to promote their wares at both Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals. The stalls were very popular in their day and Karen did an enormous amount of work to keep the store-holders "on track" and to reassure anxious customers, usually members of staff, as to when their favourite stall would next be on site!!

Karen has been pro-active in encouraging the involvement of younger people in volunteering. It has brought great joy to Karen that some of those who have begun working in one of our hospitals as a volunteer have gone on to take up employment in the NHS, some of them in careers in medicine. It is typical of Karen that she has responded with equal interest and care to the young and the not so young – and to everyone in between!

Among the 500 or so Trust volunteers are about 80 volunteers who work with the Chaplaincy. When Karen became Voluntary Services Manager for the Trust she took on with the Chaplains the shared responsibility for the Chaplaincy Volunteers. The Trust Chaplains are hugely indebted to her, not only for her practical support but for the interest that she has so consistently taken in this area of volunteering as in all others.

Karen has been responsible for a large number of hugely successful “thank you” events for volunteers over the years. These evenings have always been very popular, offering not only a lovely meal and a glass of wine, but proving both entertaining and informative as well. Karen has usually put together an audio-visual presentation, including her very memorable “A-Z” of volunteering! One year Karen introduced a Quiz – and that quickly became an essential part of the evening! On each occasion Karen has never forgotten to thank all those individuals and groups who have so generously maintained the work of the Volunteers. Karen herself is a person of great humility and always shy of receiving the thanks that are so rightly due to her.

It is therefore very appropriate that Karen was one of the first ever recipients of the Trust’s Peter Adams Award for outstanding service to the Trust and to the Community. Peter Adams had been a consultant at Ashford Hospital and the award now annually given in his name was presented to Karen at the Trust Appreciation Awards by Nick Adams, Peter’s son. Karen was a popular and worthy winner of this special award. Karen herself contributed to the evolution of the Appreciation Awards. For a number of years Karen had presented her volunteers with long-service awards and this idea was taken up by a former Director of Human Resources and used as the model for the staff long-service presentations.

All the changes that have taken place in the Trust over the years have inevitably meant changes for the Volunteers as well. Karen has provided a stable foundation from which changes can be implemented and accepted. One of the Trust’s most popular food outlets, the Atrium at Ashford, received great support from Karen during a time of transition and change. Most recently Karen has reviewed and developed the role of the volunteers on reception at St. Peter’s in order to accommodate the changing nature of the work.

Any thanks to Karen would be incomplete without acknowledging those who have worked alongside her in Voluntary services. During a time of change and growth for Voluntary Services Karen continued to work closely with Freda Larham who had previously been Voluntary Services Manager at St. Peter’s. Karen’s own very able assistants have included Maureen Mansell and, latterly, Janet Stansfield. All those who have had the privilege of working closely with Karen have benefited from her wise counsel and sound common sense.

Karen takes great pride in a job well done. She is both visionary and creative. She has a wonderful sense of humour and a great depth of compassion. She has often encouraged her volunteers with the simplest and wisest words: “You made the Difference”. In her turn Karen has made the greatest of difference in the life of ASPH.