



COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust

The East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust (EEAST) provides care and support for up to a million patients across Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire each year, thanks in part to its dedicated team of 2,600 frontline operational and clinical staff. The sirens, blue lights and ambulance staff responding to 999 emergency calls are all a familiar sight – but, behind the scenes, EEAST also depends on around 2,000 community volunteers, including teams from RAF Marham, RAF Henlow and RAF Honington.

“All our volunteers have a day job, but they go out on behalf of the Ambulance Trust within their community,” says Terry Hicks, EEAST’s Sector Head for Norfolk and Waveney. “The RAF co-responders are part of that scheme, and they’re sponsored by their station commanders to be able to do this.”

Before joining EEAST, Hicks spent nine years in the RAF. He’s now this NHS Trust’s Armed Forces Champion, so he knows just how important the relationship between the two services can be. “A lot of it is about leadership, a can-do attitude and personal resilience, which the Armed Forces instils in you,” he explains. “It gives you a very good grounding and aptitude for public service.”

EEAST has twice received the silver award for Defence Employer Recognition, and mutual support is very much in line with the trust’s values of honesty, care, respect, teamwork and quality. Each team of RAF co-responders attends a blue-light driver training programme and operates as a two-person crew, equipped with a fully marked-up ambulance car, as well as life-saving kit like defibrillators, oxygen and blood-pressure tests.

“The RAF teams are able to do a little bit more than our normal community first responders, so there’s a wide range of patient cohorts they will go to,” says Hicks. “We try to target those areas that are quite hard to reach – so, for example, in some rural parts of Norfolk, like where the RAF Marham car is, it can be challenging for an ambulance to reach some locations within an allotted time frame.”

This means volunteer co-responders are often the first line of defence, attending medical emergencies and administering life-saving treatments, closely followed by backup from a frontline clinical crew. “Time counts when somebody’s in a cardiac arrest, or having breathing difficulties, so the quicker we can get someone to a patient’s side, the better the outcome,” says Hicks. “Our volunteers absolutely do save lives.”

www.eeastamb.nhs.uk