



## Discover Tai Chi

Blesma's most popular course is back.

It's time to unlock the health benefits of Tai Chi

**Inside:** The key points covered at the Association's AGM



**Jon Noble is one of two people in the UK to own a Jaco assistive robotic arm**

**He tells his story in the next issue of Blesma Magazine. Out in November**

# Blesma Bulletin

## Autumn 2021



It is with much pleasure and delight that I welcome you all to the autumn edition of the Bulletin. We are now well into the summer having weathered a long, Covid-troubled winter and hope the contents provides helpful advice on issues that are close to your heart; be it housing, progress with

Veterans UK, outreach activities or wider benefits advice. A continued success has been the activities run by our Outreach team. The menu of options has been terrific which is shown by the huge uptake and constant demand from you as Members. I am also pleased that we have now run several outdoor activities, the first being a nerve-racking run on the fastest zip wire in Europe by some of our braver Members. This was run the same day as partial lockdown was lifted, which highlights that we don't hang around.

As a reminder; if you have yet to venture online and are considering doing so, please chat to your Support Officer who can help. I am pleased to say that one of our Members in South Africa did so this month and has been amazed at the services, family and friends he can now access.

It is with great relief that we have seen such a wonderful response in rolling out the vaccination programme across the UK, and I hope all those of you at risk have now had your second jab. Where access to a vaccination centre or GP practice remains an issue for you, please contact your BSO for advice.

At the time of this Bulletin being published, preparations are well underway for us to hold our annual Members' Weekend in October. Whilst it is not our usual time to meet, we hope it will give us more assurance given the new variant of Covid on the horizon. The weekend is fully booked and a waiting list is now being managed by our Activities Team.

Since January, the Head Office team have been active in engaging Veterans UK as a way of improving their service to you. Although the signs are very promising, there is still much to do. To help us in how we work with them, please outline your experiences with Veterans UK in an email to [info@blesma.org](mailto:info@blesma.org).

Finally, good luck to our Paralympic hopefuls; Lesley Stewart (target shooting), Stu Robinson (wheelchair rugby), Mickey Yule (powerlifting) and Jaco Van Gass (cycling). Their journey has been long, and Blesma is proud to have been able to provide support.

**Ian Harper**  
*Director Independence and Wellbeing*



Cover photography: Lisa Holmes

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# The 2021 Blesma Annual General Meeting (AGM)

The 2021 Blesma AGM took place on Sunday 13 June by video conference. Some 12 Members and four Honorary Members with voting rights took part in the meeting. Some 89 proxy voting instructions were received. The meeting was therefore quorate in accordance with Blesma's Articles of Association and Rules.

- The 2020 Trustees' Annual Report and Accounts were briefed and received
- Crowe UK LLP was appointed as the Auditor
- The AGM voted to amend Blesma's Articles and Rules to reflect changes proposed to the membership
- Mr Andy Mudd, Mr Miles Ambler and Mr Bob Watts resigned as Trustees
- Mr Miles Ambler and Mr Bob Watts were re-appointed as Trustees
- Mr Liam Maguire, Mr Rob Kerrigan and Mr Brendan West were appointed as Trustees

The National Chairman reviewed the 2020 Trustees' Annual Report and concluded that Blesma had coped well with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. He was confident that the Association was in a strong position to support its Members and keep them closely connected as the country begins

to emerge from the crisis. The Treasurer then briefed the meeting on the Financial Statements.

Although 2020 had been a difficult year, there was light at the end of the tunnel as the Bank of England had upgraded its 2021 growth outlook for the UK to 7.25% in May; up from 5% in February. The brighter economic forecast came as the country gradually emerged from lockdown and more people were being vaccinated against Covid. This should have a positive impact on Blesma's financial position in 2021, although the country is not yet clear of financial uncertainty and the crisis has had a huge impact on the economy and government spending.

The Chief Executive briefed the meeting that the Trustees had proposed that Blesma's Articles and Rules be updated as follows:

- To reflect the change in MOD terminology from "Auxiliary" to "Reserve" Forces
- To reflect the Trustees' intention that the Board should consist of at least 50% Member Trustees
- To confirm the requirement for Trustees to complete Blesma's Eligibility and Code of Conduct declaration before appointment in accordance with Blesma's Governance Standing Instructions
- To allow Trustees to delegate responsibility for admitting

Members to the Association to a Blesma Director where they meet the eligibility criteria within the rules

- To reflect Charity Commission guidance on how Members may be removed from the Association if this is considered necessary
- To reflect the use of email communications, particularly in communications with overseas Members
- To remove a section of the Rules that refers to Branch Areas as Blesma no longer has these

The membership had been notified of the proposed changes in the calling notice for the meeting, and copies of the proposed amendments to the Rules had been published on the Blesma website. The motion was carried by a majority.

The Chairman noted that Blesma Trustees had been through a recruiting process and would normally serve for nine years. If Members decided that Trustees were not performing as expected, the membership could decide not to re-elect them. The previous vote had confirmed the intention that the board should consist of at least 50% Member Trustees, while the Board sought to also recruit Trustees with specific skills and experience to advise on issues such as communications or the law.

A Member said that the voting form should reflect the fact that the proposed Trustees were co-opted



Blesma's Chief  
Executive Jon Bryant

onto the Board and future versions should reflect this. This was agreed.

A Member asked what Blesma was doing to influence the performance of Veterans UK and increase knowledge within the Association about the War Pensions claims process. The Chief Executive responded that the Association had sought to improve its knowledge and contacts. Blesma was working on a Memorandum of Understanding, as well as an updated contacts list, monthly meetings and staff visits.

The Member said that he was pleased that Blesma had sought to engage and contribute to improving the service. The Chairman responded that Blesma would look to increase its advocacy on behalf of the membership; he had met the new Minister for Veterans' Affairs and would look to re-engage on issues with specific evidence.

In response to a question from a Member on the provision of care, the Chairman responded that Blesma continued to support those formerly resident at the Blackpool Home. A BSO added that the Association had a process in place whereby Blesma could assist other Members facing difficulties with care through the grants process.

A Member asked about the review of Blesma's rules on Loss of Use of Limb. The Chief Executive said that the Association had approached the chair of the NHS Rehabilitation & Disability Clinical Reference Group to ask whether similar criteria to that in place for loss of hearing or sight (i.e. loss of 80%) should apply. The unequivocal advice was that this was not an appropriate course of action as it was not possible to identify a percentage of loss.

The Association was advised

that a diagnosis from a medical professional should be required. Although Blesma's rules defining membership criteria were not changed, the application process had been updated to reflect the advice on diagnosis. The Chairman added that in circumstances where there was evidence to suggest that a Member's condition had significantly improved, perhaps to the extent that continued membership may no longer be appropriate, the Board would look to engage constructively with the Member. In this way, he believed that Blesma had set its rules to be fair and to provide the right level of support to those who manifestly deserve it.

A Member asked for an update on the Llandudno Rehabilitation and Training Centre and asked whether more use could be made of this facility. The Chief Executive responded that the centre is a rehabilitation and training facility, funded by a £1.25M LIBOR grant in 2014 following a joint bid by Blind Veterans and Blesma. The Association would examine how to make better use of the facility.

A Member proposed a vote of thanks for the Board and staff. While the discussions at the AGM had been robust, the work done on behalf of Members was appreciated. The Chairman replied that the Blesma Board and management welcomed constructive challenges, and he was grateful to those Members who had engaged with the AGM. He added his thanks to the staff of the Association who had worked hard to overcome the challenges of a difficult but ultimately successful year.

**Jon Bryant**  
Chief Executive

# Access healthcare through Veterans Trauma Network

**D**id you know that you can use the Veterans Trauma Network (VTN) to access NHS healthcare? The only criteria are that you must be a veteran and that your physical healthcare issue must be as a result of military service. The service follows existing NHS pathways and is currently available across England and Wales. The VTN lead at NHS England is in talks with NHS Scotland about how this service can be delivered in Scotland.

## WHAT IS IT?

The VTN is a collection of 13 NHS Veteran Trauma Centres and four specialist units, each with military and civilian medical experts who are all able to help with physical service-related issues. They will work with you to develop the best clinical plan for your needs.

The VTN will not necessarily prioritise you over other NHS patients. The aim is to get you to the teams who can understand your needs and deal with them appropriately. Your care will be prioritised on clinical need, in the spirit of The Armed Forces Covenant, as would happen with any NHS patient. No other NHS patient will be disadvantaged by the VTN.

## WHO IS IT FOR?

You must have served for at least one day in the UK Armed Forces. You must be entitled to routine

NHS care (e.g. meet residency requirements). The health need you have must be as a result of your military service.

## WHY IS IT NEEDED?

It has been recognised that some military veterans have specific health issues related to their service. The expertise to deal with these problems can be found in the Veterans Trauma Network. Getting you to the right team will be better for you and will support your family and GP. The Veterans Trauma Network will also help you and your family to access other kinds of non-medical help and advice.

## WHERE ARE THEY?

### *The Veteran Trauma*

### *Centres are located in:*

Birmingham  
Brighton  
Bristol  
Cambridge  
Leeds  
Liverpool  
London (3 centres)  
Middlesbrough  
Nottingham  
Oxford  
Plymouth

### *The specialist units are in:*

East Grinstead  
Frimley Park  
Preston  
Salisbury



# Veterans UK liaison update

There are clinicians with different specialities in the above locations so your care may not necessarily be local to you. However, staff will endeavour to find the best person to support your health needs.

## WHAT DOES THE VTN DEAL WITH?

Despite the word “trauma” in the name, the VTN deals with all veterans’ physical health issues resulting from their time in service; from recurrent heat illness to problems after limb loss, and from traumatic brain injury to service-related fertility issues. The VTN is closely linked to veterans’ mental health services and charities such as Blesma and Blind Veterans UK, so can offer comprehensive care focused around your needs.

## HOW?

All that is required is for you to tell your GP about the VTN and ask for a referral to its central hub. The VTN will do the rest and will keep you and your GP informed.

BSO (Prosthetics) is a member of the programme board for the Veterans Trauma Network and is a member of the initial multi-disciplinary team that assesses anonymous referrals to ensure the correct support is available to the veteran patient. This will include allocation of a veteran support worker where necessary.



**B**lesma has held a number of meetings recently with representatives at Veterans UK with the aim of re-invigorating the charities’ previous working relationship. An immediate outcome has been the establishment of a direct liaison link between Blesma and Veterans UK which will see BSO (Prosthetics) and a member of Veterans UK acting as ‘Liaison Officers’. This will enable faster communication on priority matters affecting Members.

Veterans UK has provided Blesma Support Officers with a contact list that should enable them to chase up Member enquiries directly with case officers or specific teams. If delays or problems occur, they will be escalated via the liaison officers.

Veterans UK requires an appropriate data release consent form to share information with BSOs. Consequently, Blesma is working with Veterans UK on a digital version that will reduce the administrative burden for BSOs and enable faster communication.

In addition to this, Blesma and Veterans UK have agreed to work together on providing mutually beneficial training. This will see Blesma Support Officers being provided with up-to-date training on all aspects of the work of Veterans UK, and in return Blesma will provide training on its work to Veterans UK staff.

Please continue to engage with Veterans UK as required, but do remember that your Support Officer is there to assist as and when needed.

# Help with housing law, debts and evictions

**Y**our home is your castle, right? A place where you are safe, secure, happy and can hopefully relax with family and friends. However, many people who rent their homes and have struggled financially through the COVID-19 pandemic now live with the fear of eviction as the Government lifts the eviction ban.

Housing law has always been notoriously complicated, and during the pandemic central government and the devolved administrations have responded with different measures, following different timescales, leading to a complex set of rules which can be confusing for anyone trying to manage their tenancy and avoid eviction.

In March 2020, there was a ban on bailiff-enforced evictions to provide some security for tenants with rent arrears in a time of significant economic and social disruption. Eviction notice periods were also increased. Pre-pandemic, most landlords had to give tenants a minimum of two months' notice to leave their home. Since March 2020, these rules changed several times and notice periods now depend on the date the eviction notice was served, the reasons for eviction, and the location of the tenancy.

For example, in Northern Ireland, from May 2020 a tenant is entitled to a minimum of 12 weeks' notice.



**There are solutions for anyone with concerns about potential eviction**

Meanwhile, in England, from June 2021 a landlord must give at least four months' notice of eviction.

Bans on bailiff-enforced evictions are being lifted around the UK as restrictions ease, leading to concern that there will be a spike in evictions and an increase in homelessness. There is also expected to be an increase in tenants struggling with rent arrears and other debts.

It is complicated, and the rules

on eviction depend on the type of tenancy, who the landlord is (council, housing association or private landlord), location within the UK, and what the current COVID-19 restrictions are. The most common reason for eviction of tenants is rent arrears, however there are different regulations for evictions where there is domestic abuse or anti-social behaviour.

Many people don't know what a bailiff-enforced eviction is. Often, tenants don't realise that once their eviction notice period has expired, their landlord still needs to seek an eviction order from the court before a bailiff can be instructed to attend the property and remove the tenants and their belongings. This is the absolute worst-case scenario, and tenants should seek advice early to avoid what is undoubtedly a stressful situation.

If you are experiencing any concern about your tenancy and potential eviction, please seek help as there are solutions available. Your BSO will be able to assist you and should be your first point of contact. Shelter and The Citizens Advice Bureau can also provide advice and support. Your local authority will also have a housing and homelessness advice service.

### DEBTS? ASK FOR SOME BREATHING SPACE

According to The Money Charity, people in the UK owed £1,712.9 billion at the end of March 2021. This is up by £27.1 billion, an extra £511 per adult. For many people, the pandemic has put a huge strain on finances and ability to manage housing costs and bills. Having unmanageable debt has been shown to lead to further problems including mental and physical health issues, relationship breakdowns and homelessness.

From May 2021, in England and Wales, the Government introduced 'Breathing Space', or the Debt Respite Scheme as it is officially known. It is similar to the Debt Arrangement Scheme in Scotland. There are two types of Breathing Space: standard and mental health crisis. Both relieve the pressure of dealing with creditors so individuals can focus on getting debt advice and set up a debt solution without worrying about being chased for payment or incurring extra charges.

The standard scheme lasts for 60 days, with the mental health crisis scheme lasting for the period of the crisis plus 30 days. Access to the scheme is via an accredited debt adviser and is free to set up. It is not a payment holiday and if you can make payments to your creditors you should continue to do so. However, you will not be subject to any enforcement action, for example visits from bailiffs. Also, interest, fees or charges cannot be added during the period.

If you are concerned about debt please seek support from your BSO as there will be a solution to help you. The Citizens Advice Bureau and Step Change are national charities that can also provide information, advice and support about debts.

## Xmas cards to support the Association

**E**nclosed in this issue of the Bulletin is a leaflet to order your Blesma Christmas cards. This year, we have a variety of cards with a conscience. All our cards are plastic free and packaged in cardboard boxes. We do not apply additional finishes to our cards, such as glitter, due to the environmental impact. Our cards are printed in the UK, the board is sustainably sourced, and all inks used are vegetable based.

The designs range from the traditional, such as choir boys and the Nativity scene, to more modern cards. You can also purchase gift wrap kits as well as a 'Santa kit' which contains everything needed to keep the little ones entertained on Christmas Eve.

Our Christmas cards are always very popular, so get ahead, beat the crowds and place your order now.

## Happy 100th birthday!

**C**ongratulations and happy birthday to the following Members who were born between 16 March and 31 August 1921, and who have recently celebrated their 100th birthday.

**Lilian Almond**  
**Joyce Dowsett**  
**Kathleen James**  
**Mary Lomas**  
**Eileen Phillips**  
**Elizabeth Purvis**  
**Evelyn Scott**

# Forces MoneyPlan offers free confidential guidance

**E**ffective and relevant Member support is at the heart of what Blesma seeks to deliver. Our team of Blesma Support Officers provide advice and assistance on the War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, as well as on a whole range of other allowances including disability and sickness benefits, out of work benefits, and carer benefits.

However, some of our Members require more general financial guidance to ensure their long-term financial security and wellbeing. Depending on individual circumstances, this might involve help in clarifying where personal or family finances stand today, where they need to be in the future, how best to deal with any urgent financial matters, and how to deal with any financial shocks in the future (e.g. illness, investment losses, debt or bankruptcy).

As a result, since 01 July 2018, a free financial guidance service called Forces MoneyPlan, which is delivered by a professional financial adviser and member of The Personal Finance Society, has been made available to Blesma's Members, Widows and carers.

## WHAT EXACTLY IS FORCES MONEYPLAN?

Most professions offer 'pro bono' (free) services to certain groups of people. Forces MoneyPlan offers

a free, no obligation, entirely confidential one-off meeting with a fully qualified, professional financial adviser who has agreed to give up their time to provide generic financial guidance to help Blesma Members and their families identify and understand their financial position based on their specific circumstances.

It aims to help Members make better informed decisions about their financial options and to show them how best to plan their finances.

The meeting can be conducted face to face, over the telephone or via Skype depending on preference. After the meeting, a personalised 'Options and Priorities' written report summarising key points discussed will be issued by post or email. At this point, any decision about further contact with the financial adviser is placed firmly in the Member's control and they will not be contacted again by this, or any other financial adviser associated with the Personal Finance Society unless they specifically request it.

## WHAT IS GENERIC FINANCIAL GUIDANCE?

Most of us don't differentiate between information, guidance and advice in our daily lives, but there is an important distinction when it comes to financial matters.

'Generic Financial Guidance' is intended to provide general

information on the range of options, helping the recipient narrow down choices and make better informed decisions for which they are ultimately responsible.

It tells them what they 'could' do. It will not tell them what they 'should' do or which product to buy – that's what Regulated Financial Advice is. If Regulated Financial Advice is what is needed; to help identify and source an appropriate investment fund or financial product, for example, then it will need to be paid for as an additional service provided at a subsequent meeting. The important point to appreciate is that during and after the initial guidance session, you will be under no pressure whatsoever to do so.

## SOME EXAMPLES OF HOW GENERIC FINANCIAL GUIDANCE MIGHT HELP

**Generic financial guidance can:**

1. Ensure greater control over your day-to-day finances (including debt)
2. Help you build a financial plan for the future
3. Help you understand how best to manage your finances in general
4. Help you to make informed choices as to the advantages and disadvantages of the many different types of savings, investment, pension or protection products available

The screenshot shows the Personal Finance Society website. At the top left is the PFS logo with the tagline 'Standards. Professionalism. Trust.' and a search bar. The navigation menu includes 'About us', 'Membership', 'Learning', 'News & insight', and 'Events'. The main header features the 'FORCES MoneyPlan' logo over a photo of a man hugging a child. Below this is a breadcrumb trail: 'Home > About us > Initiatives > Forces MoneyPlan'. The main content area contains a welcome message, a description of the initiative, and three buttons: 'Volunteer', 'Partners', and 'Register for financial guidance'.

5. Help you understand retirement income options available based on your existing pension scheme/s
6. Help you understand how much risk you are comfortable (and able) to take when considering what to do with your money
7. Help you identify financial planning opportunities that you might not be aware of and want to consider
8. Make you aware of financial exemptions that may apply to you (for example, the circumstances by which (ex) Service men or women can secure complete exemption from Inheritance Tax on death)
9. Help you understand how 'Personal Injury Trusts' work and their relevance to you
10. Answer questions about financial matters in general, stemming from events such

as approaching retirement (age 55+), buying a home, starting work/changing jobs, having a baby/starting a family or redundancy/illness/disability/negative life events

11. Help you navigate the complexities of sourcing and funding care (via local authorities and/or the NHS)
12. Where you are a self-funder (responsible for some or all of your care fees), help you understand the different ways you might pay, and the advantages and disadvantages of each

For this service to be of value, you don't need to have significant assets, money to invest or have a given level of income – the consultation is free regardless of your current financial position.

However, if you do have money

to invest or are looking for advice about financial actions you should take, it can help you understand whether and how you might benefit from Regulated Financial Advice without any commitment or feeling of obligation to take matters further.

### WHAT IS THE PERSONAL FINANCE SOCIETY?

The Personal Finance Society (PFS) is the professional body for the UK financial planning profession, with more than 35,000 members made up of financial advisers and support staff. It is not a trade body, and as such doesn't represent the interests of its members, but encourages the highest professional standards through ensuring its members undertake rigorous qualifications, continuing professional development, and operate under a strict code of ethics.

The PFS also operates under a Royal Charter that was awarded by the Monarch in 1912 and ensures the purpose of the PFS is to 'secure and justify the confidence of the public'. On the back of Forces MoneyPlan, the PFS has signed the Armed Forces Covenant which has been formally registered by the Ministry of Defence.

### HOW DO I FIND OUT MORE OR REQUEST A MEETING?

In the first instance, get in touch with your Blesma Support Officer who will explain how you can take advantage of this service and what to do next.

# The charity that helps veterans find careers

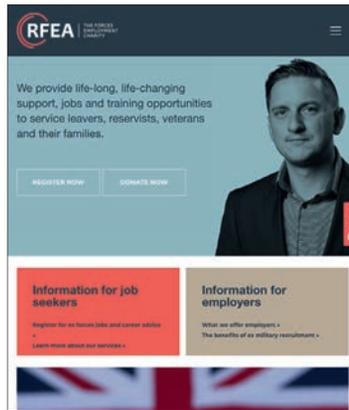
**T**he Forces Employment Charity (RFEA) has helped more than 19,000 veterans work towards new careers in the last year despite lockdown slowing job vacancies.

RFEA provides life-long and life-changing support, job opportunities and training to Service leavers, Reservists, veterans and their families, irrespective of circumstances, rank, length of service, or reason for leaving.

The charity's work has received vital ongoing support thanks to a generous donation of £91,800 from The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC) and its funding partner, Greenwich Hospital, which provides support to serving and former members of the Naval Service and their families.

The funding is part of a successful multi-year partnership which continues essential employment support for Royal Marines and Royal Navy veterans across the country, with services encompassing all elements needed to be successful in a job search.

This includes everything from CV advice and interview skills to support with finding suitable employment opportunities, as well as motivation and workplace social skills. This funding is especially important as unemployment is rising in 2021 and the numbers registering for support in January 2021 were at an all-time high.



The charity also works with clients to identify any other underlying issues such as housing and debt, or health problems such as PTSD, which may act as a barrier to securing meaningful employment.

Employment and wellbeing support are going to be critical for recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 and thanks to the backing of RNRMC, The Forces Employment Charity will be able to offer help to the increasing number of veterans seeking its support since the pandemic.

Nicki Bradley from Plymouth, a former Leading Naval Nurse in the Royal Navy, served from 1992 until 2006. After leaving the Service she struggled to transfer her valuable experience into skills that were recognised by civilian employers. RFEA was able to help her recognise the value of her skills and translate them into suitable

job opportunities. With the support of her RFEA Regional Advisor, Nicki secured a job placement, which led to her being employed in her current role as a part-time administrator.

“After being made redundant and then being unemployed for three years, my new job means I am able to come off benefits and be proud to be earning my own money once more,” says Nicki. “I feel I have purpose again and can convey this feeling to my children. I can now improve on skills I already possess as well as acquire new ones through workplace development courses.”

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*If you are interested in getting in touch with the RFEA, or need any advice on employment matters, speak to your Support Officer. You can find out more about The Forces Employment Charity at [www.rfea.org.uk](http://www.rfea.org.uk)*

# Blesma Connects for Outreach activities

**O**ur Members will all be aware that alongside Blesma's impressive calendar of national activities, smaller-scale local events are an equally important part of the Blesma offer. These local activities, organised by a team of Outreach Officers, allow Members to get to know others in their area and form lasting friendships.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, like the rest of our Activities Programme, these events have

had to become online affairs. As we slowly return to normal, and in-person get togethers can make a cautious comeback, we are aiming to list our local activities, both in-person and online, on our app and website.

Outreach activities can now be found on the Blesma Connects app. Search in the Activities section under the heading Local (Outreach Events) to find a wide range of events that are taking place near you in the coming months.

## Couples' Christmas Markets

### 03-06 December

Get into the Christmas spirit and spread some festive cheer at the Edinburgh Christmas Markets. You'll be able to enjoy a weekend of activities with your partner in the Scottish capital, including taking in the festive illuminated trail at The Royal Botanic Gardens and sampling delicious treats at the legendary Christmas Markets.

**Who can take part:** Any Member plus their spouse/partner. Please note the markets can get crowded.

## Members' Weekend 2021: an update

**T**he application list for Members' Weekend is now full and if you have applied you will receive a letter in the next few weeks with further information. Anyone who still wishes to apply can do so, but will automatically be placed on the reserve list. If cancellations begin to filter through, we will be contacting Members on the reserve list to offer them a place at this year's event.

*To apply for a place on the reserve list, please go to [www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org) and complete the application form*



# Meet our new staff members

## STEVE BURRELL BSO LONDON AND SOUTH EAST

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Following in the footsteps of Blesma Member and former BSO London and South East, Paul Findlay, we welcome Steve Burrell to the Association. Steve will be receiving his induction with the support of Blesma's whole BSO team and making contact with the Members in his area to be properly introduced very soon. Welcome Steve!

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### What did you do before you joined Blesma?

I worked for Blind Veterans UK as a community support worker for Hertfordshire for three years. The role involved working with veterans who had either lost their sight in service, or years after due to various eye conditions such as macular degeneration and glaucoma.

Before that, I was in the Army for 22 years. The first decade was spent in the AGC (SPS) as a military clerk, where I was fortunate to serve with various units in the UK and Germany. I was even lucky enough to have a two-year posting to a NATO HQ in Portugal.

For the last 12 years of my military career I worked in the Army Welfare Service providing support to soldiers and their



families; this included everything from low-level counselling to working on child protection cases.

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### Why did you want to join the Association?

I thoroughly enjoyed my time and experiences with Blind Veterans UK and it is an excellent charity in its own right. I have known for years about the great support Blesma provides limbless veterans, and when an opportunity came up to join the team I knew I had to apply.

I wanted the new challenge of working with a broader range of veterans, and wanted to learn more about the challenges facing Blesma Members and understand how I can play my part in assisting them.

### What are you hoping to achieve in your new role?

I am keen to get to introduce myself and, as restrictions allow, start carrying out home visits, especially to those who may have not had any visitors for a while now. I am learning the ropes at the moment, but am incredibly well supported by the wider BSO team. I am very fortunate that I get to work with Jess Linge, the Outreach Officer for London and South East, and we are working on some very exciting trips/opportunities as restrictions ease whilst ensuring that we keep an online presence, as well as being at the end of the phone.

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### What do you like to do outside of work?

I am a very keen amateur cook and love to dabble with new recipes. I bought a smoker during lockdown to slow cook meat over hours of low heat, but still have not managed to get this going. I am also partial to real ale and will seek out local breweries, ale pubs and festivals. I also run and exercise to balance all the food and drink! I also run a pub quiz at a local pub that helps increase my general knowledge and knowledge of useless trivia.



**ANNA SCALERA**  
HEAD OF FUNDRAISING

**Tell us about your background...**  
I've worked in the voluntary sector for 20 years, mostly in events and community fundraising. During the second wave of the pandemic I coordinated emergency food deliveries in the London Borough of Southwark for vulnerable individuals and families.

**What will you bring to the role?**  
Blesma fundraising has performed well this past year despite the pandemic. I'd like to build on that by growing existing events and increasing our supporter base through new activities. I'm excited to lead the team through this period.

**What should Members do if they want to fundraise for Blesma?**  
Get in touch with the Fundraising Team on 020 8548 7089 or by email at fundraising@blesma.org. Whether you would like to take part in a pre-organised fundraising activity or have your own plans, the team will be happy to help.

**What do you do outside of work?**  
Before lockdown I was competing in, and organising, ballroom dancing events across the UK. During lockdown I developed new hobbies such as sewing, walking and running.



**IVONA ANDREJSOVA**  
IT AND ADMIN SUPPORT.

**Tell us about yourself...**  
I am an economic policy and administration graduate from the Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague. I am also a management of tourism graduate from the University of Hradec Kralove, Czechia and I am currently a part-time postgraduate student of information and communication technology at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge.

I have more than 17 years of administrative experience as a senior administrative officer in the public health sector.

I have a high-energy personality, so love being on the go and busy! I am also a very fast learner. As IT and Admin Support for Blesma, I will use my IT and administrative skills, and analytical thinking, to support the smooth running of Blesma Chelmsford.



**JULIE (JOO LZ) HITCHCOCK**  
DATABASE MANAGER

**Tell us about your role...**  
It's a multi-layered role working across the various Blesma teams. From the Member database to the fundraising database, the main focus is ensuring the databases meet the needs of the staff using them. It's always a work in progress. GDPR is an important part of the role, as is reconciliation of donations, so I work closely with the Individual Giving Officer.

**Have you settled into Blesma?**  
It's been a massive learning curve, as starting any new role is, but I have had amazing support from colleagues across the teams, with a special shout out to Lisa Povey and Anita Jolly. What's been so refreshing is how quickly everybody welcomed me into the Blesma Team, and now, five months on, I feel like I have always been here. A big thank you to everyone!

# Northern Ireland VE Day virtual cream tea

**S**aturday 08 May marked 76 years since VE Day – the day we commemorate the end of the Second World War in Europe. Although coronavirus restrictions meant that there were no street parties, parades or concerts this year, that didn't stop Blesma's Members in Northern Ireland from celebrating the occasion.

With help from Blackwell House in County Armagh, Outreach Officer for Northern Ireland, Fiona Morrison was able to create a celebration that Members could take part in from home, with a VE Day celebration cream tea.

Fiona was able to meet and thank the owners of Blackwell House for baking and despatching the cream tea boxes across

Northern Ireland, and was able to drop off to local Members' doorsteps. Some Members met up virtually to enjoy the occasion, whilst others were able to celebrate the day with family.



WHAT MEMBERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND HAD TO SAY ABOUT THE DAY:

**“A great way to celebrate and remember all those who gave everything and all those who helped rebuild the nation”**



**“This was a great way to get into the spirit of VE Day, with bunting, decorations and tea sets, and celebrating together on Zoom”**

**“The VE Day cream tea was a unique idea. Everything tasted fresh and beautiful, thoroughly enjoyable. Many thanks”**

## Midlands VE Day chocolate making



**T**hings were looking equally sweet for VE Day in the Midlands, where Outreach Officer Vanessa Lucas organised a chocolate making workshop for her Members over Zoom.

“Joanne and I had the chance to attend the VE day chocolate workshop, which is just one of the many online activities our local Outreach Officer Vanessa has organised,” said Member Sean Povey. “The information and ingredients received were very detailed and informative. We were given a full demonstration to follow, and this was clear and comprehensive. We had a great time and it was lovely to see and chat to other Blesma Members online. A great class, thanks Vanessa for organising and Blesma for funding.”

## Steve gets back out onto the pitch

**B**lesma Member Steve Watson has described his huge sense of pride when he put on a Newcastle United football shirt and walked out as part of the Newcastle United Amputee Football Team, in front of spectators at Doncaster’s Keepmoat Stadium to play in a fundraising exhibition match against West Bromwich Albion Amputees. The match was part of an event organised by ABF The Soldiers’ Charity in memory of five British soldiers killed in Afghanistan in 2009.

Steve became an amputee in 2019 after breaking his leg in a running accident but, having always been active, he was keen to continue his sporting endeavours. As his son Bobby is a member of the youth team at Newcastle, Steve was recruited to train with, and eventually join, the amputee team.

Steve enjoyed the sporting and fitness aspects of the team, but described them as secondary to the strong sense of brotherhood and comradeship amongst the players. One of his teammates is Eanna Durham, who is not only an amputee but is also a prosthetist at the local Limb Centre and is captain of the Irish national team.

As a recent amputee, Steve has been supported and reassured by his teammates, and he described everyone associated with the team as friendly and welcoming.

The amputee team is fully supported by Newcastle United and plays in the England Amputee Football League. Despite being the oldest player by some years, Steve is looking forward to being a regular player this season.



# Picture-perfect days out in the South West

**E**arlier this year, Blesma received generous support from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust with funding from the Covenant Fund. This year-long funding will support photography trips and other outreach activities in the South West.

The first trip – to see the SS Great Britain – took place in May.

“This was the first outdoor Blesma activity I have been on this year but I never felt concerned or worried that I was at risk of getting coronavirus,” said Mike Preater. “What a wonderful day we had seeing the SS Great Britain for a photo shoot at Bristol.

“The museum guide was very friendly, professional and could not do enough for us. We had every opportunity to take as many photographs as we needed and to take as much time as we wanted, and we never felt we had to rush.”

## MV FREEDOM TRIP

By Neil Owen

The second South West photography group trip funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust was held on 14 June thanks to Sarah Payne, our hard-working Outreach Officer, and Support Officer Steve Fraser.

Member Darran Thompson organises an online photography group, usually meeting via Zoom under current circumstances, and he too was in attendance.



The trip was to Weymouth Harbour for an outing on MV Freedom. This is a brand-new catamaran motorboat specifically designed to cater for disabled passengers and their carers. It is capable of carrying 12 passengers, six of whom can use wheelchairs or mobility scooters. It is captained and crewed by volunteers (one of the crew, Bill Belcher, is also a Member of Blesma and gave us a special welcome). The charity that

runs the MV Freedom has been in existence for 36 years, having previously run an older boat.

When we were gathering in the car park there was considerable worry that the low cloud and sea fog would be too thick for us to even leave the berth, but gradually the fog lifted and we were able to leave the harbour. It was not clear enough for us to journey down to Durdle Door/Lulworth Cove as originally planned, but we sailed

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**“It was wonderful to mix (within guidelines), and chat and laugh with old and new friends. It felt as if the world was beginning to turn again, albeit slowly”**



into Weymouth Bay to circle around three cruise ships that were anchored there. We also saw a couple of sailing boats and the local lifeboat moored up. There was a much smaller cruise ship berthed in Portland Harbour, which was understood to be cruising around the UK.

Finally, at the end of a superb morning, we saw the Weymouth Harbour ferry as we returned to the dock. The small rowing boat for paying passengers was not quite as luxurious as the cruise ships!

The morning was rounded off with a delightful lunch a short drive away. It was wonderful to mix (within official government guidelines), and chat and laugh with old and new friends. It felt as if the world was beginning to turn again, albeit slowly.

It appears that for one Blesma Member who served in the Royal Navy, it was the first time he had been on a boat in more than 25 years. He was heard calling out “Avast me hearties,” and “Repel boarders!”

A stupendous day to start the summer. Thanks everyone!

#### WHAT THE MEMBERS THOUGHT OF THE EVENT

“MV Freedom was my first time at sea since 06 November 1992, when I was flown off HMS Bulldog, and what a great experience it was. Thankfully, my sea legs were transferred to my wheelchair, and I wasn’t sick! I would recommend it to anyone with mobility needs.”

**DARRAN THOMPSON**

“A cracking venue. The boat crew were fantastic and couldn’t have been more helpful. So nice to see people in the flesh and not just via social media. Well done Sarah, Darren and Blesma – great stuff!”

**MIKE PREATER**

“A thoroughly enjoyable day. Just getting out to do what we did was worth it. Captain Steve and the crew were brilliant. The trip to the Lobster Pot [*for lunch*] was good too as I didn’t realise that there was much to Portland other than the naval base.”

**STEVE WALTERS**

# The return of the Remembrance 11K

**B**lesma is delighted to announce the return of the highly successful Remembrance 11K, a Blesma event that commemorates the significant day of Remembrance while raising vital funds for our Members.

Just as it did last year, this event will bring together the Blesma community across the nation, creating a unique and interconnected group of participants in their own local parks and neighbourhoods across all regions, uniting everyone connected to Blesma on this very important day.

From 08.30 on Sunday 14 November, you will be able to join the Blesma team virtually, wherever you are, as we come together to complete 11K in remembrance of the fallen and those who came home from conflict injured.

An event will also be streamed live from our Chelmsford office on Sunday 14 November from 08.30 so you can join us online for a live warm-up with a local personal trainer and experience the pre-race build-up.

Post-race, we will be streaming the two minutes silence, which we invite you to observe with us.

## TRACK YOUR 11K

Run 11K virtually, wherever you are, and link your Strava account



Everyone who takes part in the 11K will receive a commemorative medal

to your registration (you will have this option when you sign up). You will need to link your Strava account in order to verify your 11K and so that we can send your finisher's pack. If you don't already have Strava, it is free to download from the Apple or Android app store.

Participants will receive a special Blesma finisher's pack which will include a Remembrance 11K medal. Please note before we

send yours out, we will require verification from Strava of your 11K, which should be automatically sent to us if you have linked your Strava account during your registration. We are here to assist if you have any difficulty linking the accounts.

# The Charities Cup esports tournament

## TIMINGS

The event will take place on Sunday 14 November with the live stream and warm-up starting at 8.30am, and the run beginning at 9am. Participants running virtually can track it on Strava to confirm they have completed the distance.

The event will stay open for one month to allow flexibility for different types of fundraisers. Afterwards, you can also join the Blesma community to observe the two minutes silence at 11am, which will also be live streamed from Blesma Chelmsford.

## SIGN UP

Registration is only £25, and if you are a returning fundraiser who has taken part in other Blesma events such as the VE Day 76 challenge, the Pick Your Peak challenge, or even last year's Remembrance 11K, then you will receive a 20% discount with code: 11kwelcomeback!

**Registration opens on 23 August, and if you sign up before 23 September, you will get 10% off the registration fee with our Early Bird Discount. We look forward to seeing you there for a second year**



On 24 July, Blesma Member Daniel Bingley organised a *Call of Duty* league tournament, pitting four military charities against each other whilst raising funds for charity.

Representing Blesma were team captain Jack Cummings (above), Lionel O'Connor, Alex Harrison and Stu Warner.

Blesma, Help for Heroes, The Royal British Legion and The Wounded Warrior Project each entered a team to face off in the four-week tournament. Each Saturday in July focused on one of the four military charities, and the gamers live-streamed their matches to raise awareness and funds. Team Blesma closed out the tournament on 24 July, finishing in second place behind The Royal British Legion.

"Gaming is more than just taking part. It's about connecting

people even if it's playing a game or just chatting," said the tournament organiser Daniel Bingley. "It's about feeling valued, and this event has showed that you can still have an opportunity to take part in something great, whatever your abilities."

Blesma's team captain Jack said: "It's a great platform and a great way of communicating and having a laugh. It's competitive – of course we all want to win – but at the end of the day it's really about getting a group together, especially during this year when we've been stuck in the house for days on end!"

**To take part in Blesma esports or meet fellow gaming Members to organise friendly matches, simply contact the Activities Team or visit: [www.blesma.org/join-blesmas-e-sports-team](http://www.blesma.org/join-blesmas-e-sports-team)**

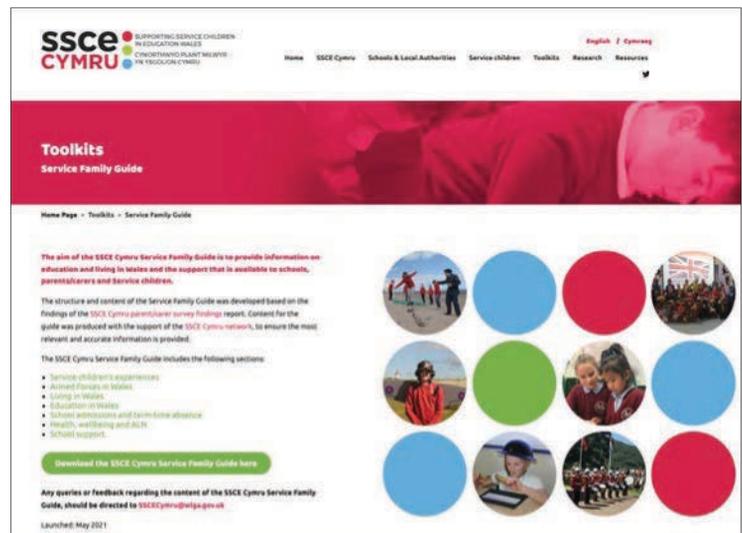
# New SSCE Cymru Service Family Guide launched

**S**upporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Cymru has launched a new Service Family Guide with the aim of providing information on education and living in Wales and the support that is available to schools, parents/carers and Service children.

Kirsty Williams MS, who served as Minister for Education in the Welsh Government, committed to identifying Service children, but there was no formal mechanism for this data collection process. SSCE Cymru started working with the Welsh Government, and liaised with Blesma and many other partners in Wales, to arrange for a question to be added to the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC).

Regional School Liaison Officers (RSLO) were appointed and have been working with all 22 local authorities in Wales to conduct a data collection activity, providing a snapshot of data as of 01 March 2021 (a heatmap is available on the SSCE Cymru website). The RSLOs are working with local authorities to establish how they plan to maintain this data in the future.

Blesma has been quick to act throughout the COVID-19 crisis, and social distancing has, of course, also had a major impact on the Making Generation R programme, which sees Blesma Members tell their stories of



overcoming adversity in schools across the nation. With schools closed, and teachers looking to online resources, students at home found that resilience was needed more than ever. Blesma Wales and West linked SSCE up with the Making Generation R team to help with the free digital resilience resource; available for all secondary schools in the UK.

The structure and content of the Service Family Guide was developed based on the findings of the SSCE Cymru parent/carer survey findings report. Content for the guide was produced with the support of the SSCE Cymru network to ensure the most relevant and accurate information was provided.

## The SSCE Cymru Service Family Guide includes the following sections:

- Service children's experiences
- Armed Forces in Wales
- Living in Wales
- Education in Wales
- School admissions and term-time absence
- Health, wellbeing and ALN
- School support

*The tools within the guide can be helpful to all Service children and their families across the UK. The guide can be found at <https://www.sscecymru.co.uk/toolkits/servicefamilyguide>*

# Tai Chi is back by popular demand

## Tai Chi/Qigong

### Six-week course

### Starts Monday 06 September

Back by popular demand, we are pleased to offer our fourth course of Tai Chi/Qigong provided by Discover Tai Chi.

Tai Chi involves slow, deliberate movements of the body combined with the controlled transfer of body weight. It can be enjoyed seated or standing and has many beneficial qualities that can enhance both your mental and physical health.

### Course dates and times

Monday 06 September at 4pm

Monday 13 September at 4pm

Monday 20 September at 4pm

Monday 27 September at 4pm

Monday 04 October at 4pm

Monday 11 October at 4pm

### Who can take part

Any Member. The course is open to all abilities, and you do not need to have any previous experience.

### WHAT MEMBERS SAID

**“I’ll be gutted if Tai Chi doesn’t continue – it’s the most beneficial thing I’ve done since amputation. Good for body, mind and soul.”**

**“The class is one of the best I’ve attended. I have osteoporosis and my practitioners are keen that I keep up a level of gentle fitness. Tai Chi is top of the list!”**

**“I don’t have the best of mobility, so this type of session is very good for my overall health.”**

**“The Tai Chi class is superb. The instructors are passionate about passing on the benefits of Tai Chi.”**

*To apply, visit the Blesma website, check the Blesma Connects app, or contact Clare Wellings on 020 3954 3021. You can also email her at [aecal@blesma.org](mailto:aecal@blesma.org)*



# Say cheese (making)

**I**n March, Members from the South West, Scotland and the North East came together on Zoom, united by their love of cheese.

In the three-hour session, Members were provided with the ingredients to make cheese from scratch at home – and it was a surprise to many that this was even possible. The Members got to try their hand at making two different types of cheese; mascarpone and halloumi. A second session saw Members making mozzarella and butter.

The kits included everything that was needed: moulds, cheese cloth and rennet. The Outreach Officers were also on hand to assist Members who were unable to

leave their home to get the required cream and milk.

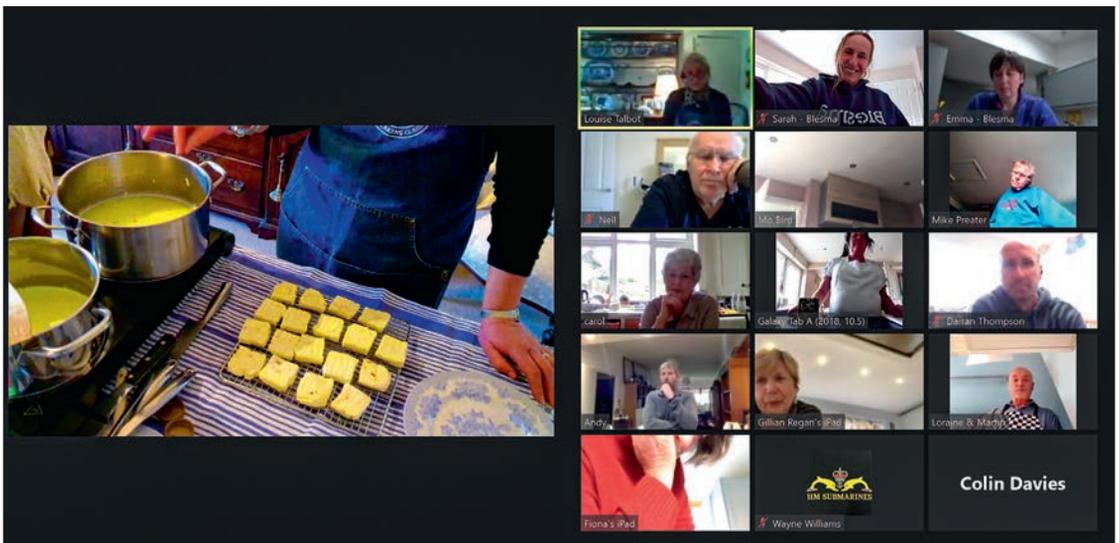
“If it was not for Blesma’s online activities, I would not have applied for the cheese making. However, as we could not go out, I thought I would give making mozzarella cheese a go,” says Member Mike Preater. “The experience was very good. We did have a lot going on; stirring, checking temperature, watching and listening to what the tutor Louise was saying. After heating and adding the acid we had to leave the milk for 30 minutes to change state.

“During this period, we made our very own butter, which tasted great, and we added salt to give it extra shelf life. We then went back to the cheese making. The

process involved a lot of handling, and as I have only one hand, I asked my wife, Lorraine, to help. By the end of the session we had made some lovely butter and mozzarella cheese, which both tasted great.

“By doing the Blesma Zoom activities you get to meet and talk to new people, you make something that you have never tried to do before, and then eat the product that you made. Making something new gave me a lot of satisfaction and pride.

“Louise, the tutor, was very professional and allowed us to ask questions, informed us of safe working and how to be hygienic. And, if we made any mistakes, she stayed calm! The time went



## Members in Northern Ireland have a taste of the good life

by in a flash and it gave me a wonderful feeling that I had made good use of time. I felt very proud of what I achieved.”

Louise, from Cutting The Curd, who provided the excellent demonstration said:

“What an enjoyable time I had teaching the two Blesma groups how to make halloumi and mozzarella. The butter-making demonstration is always enjoyed, with many commenting that they’d never realised just how simple it is to make – with delicious results too. It’s fun being able to teach a new skill and I have no doubt that some Members will continue to make cheese in the future. Thanks to Zoom, we had students from all over the country!”

*To find out more about local and virtual activities happening in your area, check out [www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org)*



**T**en households in Northern Ireland signed up to take part in an activity to enjoy a taste of *The Good Life* and hopefully find a tranquil space to relax their minds. An array of summer vegetable and salad leaf seeds, with everything needed to get started, were delivered directly to Members, and sowing commenced at the end of April.

A chat group was set up to enable those taking part to connect with each other, which proved to be a fantastic platform to post photographs, showcase the growing journey, and share advice, hints and tips. It also may have brought out a little competitiveness!

Experience ranged from those who are seasoned ‘old hands’, to others who were eager to learn. In a matter of eight weeks rewards

were being reaped in the harvesting of various herbs, lettuce, radishes, courgettes, spring onions, and with potatoes and tomatoes well on their way.

Currently, the participants are patiently waiting for the sugar snap peas, carrots and peppers. This activity has most definitely complemented the start of our face-to-face eight-week nature-based therapy course, which has been made possible thanks to our National Lottery funded project.

*You can find out more about this and other local activities at [www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org)*

# Scotland update

 Outreach Officer for Scotland, Emma Gratton has been hard at work during the last few months as she has looked to slowly start offering more in-person opportunities for Members to meet, whilst keeping up with an exciting calendar of very popular virtual activities.

Here are a few of the events that have been keeping our Scottish Members busy...

## CLAY CRAFTING

Emma was put in contact with Gaynor from Artspace G41 by Evonne, who coordinates activities for the Erskine Reid McEwan Centre (frequented by Blesma Members). Evonne was hosting veterans' clay crafting sessions online. These sessions used clay that has to be fired and glazed rather than air dried. Following confirmation of interest from a number of Members, Emma booked in a block of four sessions, during which Gaynor talked the group through different techniques. During the sessions participants made a pot, a cottage, a vase/bottle and an owl! Gaynor is a fantastic teacher and her helpful hints and tips along the way made the sessions enjoyable and productive – if a little bit messy!

“I loved every minute of the clay crafting sessions with the Blesma group. It has been wonderful to meet so many inspiring people



and hear their life stories and adventures,” said Gaynor. “It gives me great pleasure to share my pottery knowledge with others, and to see the enthusiasm and progress they have all made has been incredible.

“During these difficult times, I too have found the social aspect

very rewarding. I always look forward to our clay crafting sessions each week, and am so excited to get all the pottery finished in my studio so everyone can see their finished projects!”

## MOSAIC MAKING

Rachel Davies treated Members in Scotland to a wonderful workshop during which they made a picture out of slate and glass. It was great to see how different all the finished products looked despite everyone attending the same workshop and having the same materials to work with. Emma is now looking to see if Rachel can offer a workshop in October or November for a Remembrance-themed make, so watch this space.

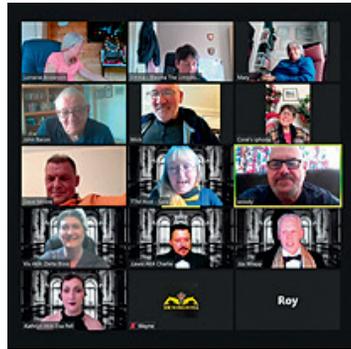
“It was a fast-paced workshop; learning the technique and then just going for it!” said Lorraine

Anderson. “It was nice to just lose yourself in pure concentration for a couple of hours. At times you could hear a pin drop as we all were creating. The finished product was beautiful and totally unexpected. A gem of an activity!”

## FRIDAY SESSIONS

The Friday drop-in sessions, during which guest speakers from a variety of different organisations provide talks on a wide range of subjects, have been proving popular. So far, discussion topics have ranged from Jack the Ripper to Butlins, genealogy, the On Course Foundation and even a comedy show from Des McLean.

Nonetheless, perhaps the most popular Friday afternoon session is *The Good Craic Quiz* hosted by Member Lorraine Anderson. The quiz brings together Members

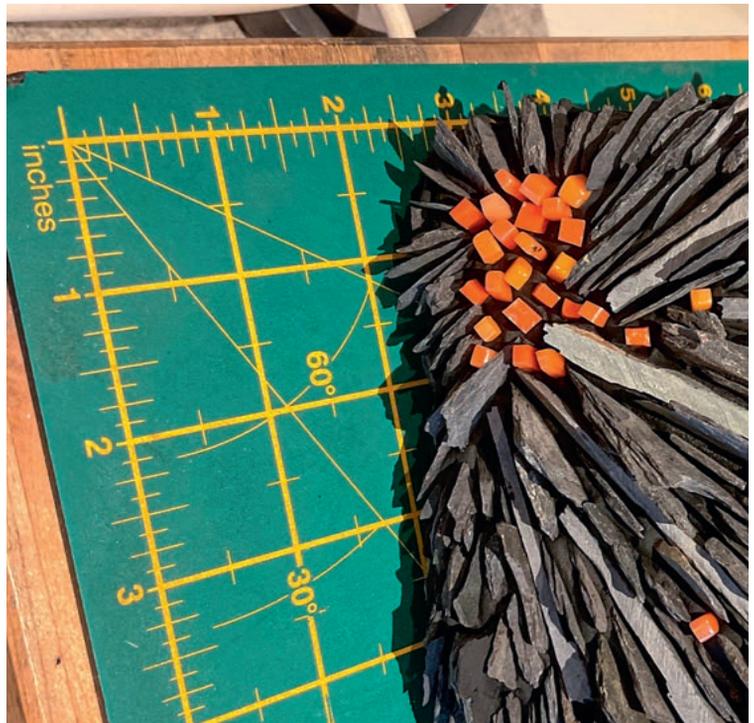


from a variety of regions and the introduction of Blesma goodies as prizes has brought a fun element of healthy competition between those attending. Thanks to Lorraine for hosting the quiz, which is thoroughly enjoyed by everyone who attends on a monthly basis.

“I enjoy making up the quiz for anyone who wants to join us

on a Friday afternoon – everyone is welcome,” says Member and quizmaster Lorraine. “The questions are all multiple choice, written on screen and read aloud – we hope to have made it as inclusive as possible. I have previously said it is my way of giving back, but that’s not quite true, as I get as much out of hosting the quiz as the guys get out of coming along!”

Ken De Soyza is one such Member who is enjoying the quiz. “I appreciate the work put in by Lorraine and enjoy the banter at the sessions,” he says. “I look forward to meeting in person those Members who I have made friends with online – the added advantage is that I know them already!”



# Sugar-crafted bears in the South West

**B**ack in February, Members in the South West took part in a super-sweet sugar crafting workshop. The unusual Zoom activity saw them learning to make cake toppers out of icing sugar. The group all made teddy bears that were catching fish through a hole in the ice.

Blesma Member Neil Owen has been a regular attendee at virtual activities since the first lockdown in March 2020.

“The only thing I’ve done with cakes is eat them, so this was a chance that could not be missed. I was amazed how detailed the instructions were over Zoom, but they were easy to follow and in no time a bear was growing and looking good – I was amazed how much fun it was and how well it turned out!” said Neil.

“I enjoyed it so much that I set out to make a baby bear with the left-over icing so I would have a sugar bear family. They looked lovely but are sadly no longer with me as a friend who was visiting saw them and they were kidnapped! I’m waiting for another sugar bear Zoom workshop to create more.”

Coral Mackenzie also enjoyed taking part in the session. “I have never felt any inclination to try to make any form of icing because it looked too difficult. I was therefore amazed at how much I enjoyed making my teddy bear. It gave



**The online sugar crafting workshop had the sweet smell of success**



me so much pleasure and was used to decorate the birthday cake of a dear little boy I know. The workshop was a wonderful experience that has given me even more respect for those who practise this art form.”

The workshop was clearly enjoyed all round, with some Members shocked to learn that even ‘roughly toughy old sailors’ could both learn and enjoy doing

sugar crafts (especially when sharing them with grandchildren and great grandchildren). Some even found their creations were just too good to eat!

# Pasty and cider for Armed Forces Day

**W**hat better way to celebrate Armed Forces Day than with a pasty and a cider? At least, that's what our Members thought when they joined us for a Zoom cider and pasty tasting session in June.

The event was hosted by Adam Fox Edwards, who owns the company which kindly provided the cider for our Members to taste. Adam is also an ex-Tornado fighter pilot and gave a fascinating insight into his experiences in service as he talked through the different tasting notes of the cider.

The event was open to Members in the North East, South, North West and Northern Ireland, and it was great to see more than 70 Members and their partners joining together virtually from all over the country.

When Adam concluded his story of service he was met with a round of applause by Members – a touching end to the evening.

“Thanks once again for another great Zoom activity,” said one Member. “I found listening to Adam’s experiences as a fighter pilot in the RAF and then him settling in Devon very interesting. From learning how he supplies locally produced food which he bakes on his premises, to him explaining the different ciders that complement the pastries – it was definitely all ‘food for thought’! All-in-all, a great evening.”

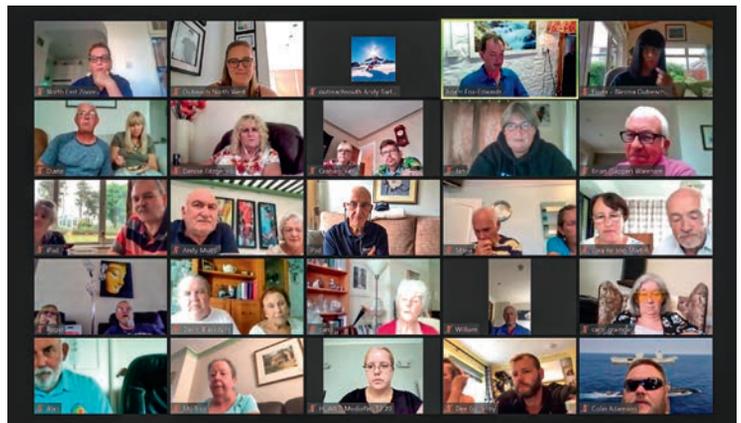
Another Member also enjoyed the evening: “In one word – *brilliant!* Adam presented the event well, perfectly intertwining his story (which was great) with the various tasting bits (which were equally as great), and the hamper itself was excellent. The finishing touch was having the four areas involved – great to see Blesma people from across the UK.

“It was a brilliant event – a big ‘well done’ to everyone involved in organising that, and a big thank

you to Adam and Devon Hampers.”

Another Member commented: “A fantastic social event. Great to see folks from four areas all having a great time. The RAF pilot talk was excellent as was the description of the locally sourced Devon products. Most of all, people stayed on and chatted for ages. Top notch event. Please pass on my thanks to the regional Outreach Officers. Just brilliant!”

And one more attendee said: “We loved the cider and the food, but best of all was seeing people from around the country, some of whom we met a couple of years ago before all this Covid business. We have been in touch on Facebook and WhatsApp, but just to see them smiling made us go all squishy inside. Did we mention that we loved the cider?”



# Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care

**W**elcome to the Bulletin's regular section on the benefits system. As well as highlighting some useful information regarding the benefits system, on occasions we will be raising awareness of some health and social care matters.

If you would like to discuss your benefit entitlement or have a social care query, please contact your Blesma Support Officer (you can find the relevant contact details on p34). Alternatively, you can contact Liz Watling in the Independence and Wellbeing team by email at [iwabenefits@blesma.org](mailto:iwabenefits@blesma.org) or by calling her on 020 8548 3516.

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## UNIVERSAL CREDIT – IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR CLAIMANTS

In March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government temporarily increased the standard rate of Universal Credit by £20 per week. This is equivalent to an extra £1,040 per year. There is lobbying taking place to request the Government continues with the increased amount. However, at the time of writing, the Government plans to end this uplift in October, which will result in claimants seeing a decrease in their monthly entitlement.

The Government started informing claimants in July by updating claimant statements, notifying them of how much of their standard allowance is a result of the temporary uplift. There will be further communications over the summer via the claimant statement and journal messages. Claimants will receive a notification alert via email or text, depending on their preferred method of communication, which will let them know to check their Universal Credit online account.

## POST OFFICE CARD ACCOUNTS

Post Office card accounts are due to end in November when the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) will stop making payments; including Universal Credit, other benefits, tax credits or your state pension, into Post Office card accounts.

The DWP will write to all customers who currently receive their State Pension or benefit payments into a Post Office card account. The letter will inform them that the Post Office card account service is closing and customers are to provide alternative account details. Their dedicated customer service centre is available to take calls from Post Office card account customers to accept new account details or answer any questions. They will ensure all future payments are switched to the customer's new account from the next available payment date and there will be no interruptions with payments. For anyone who is unable to open a different type of account or provide new account details, a payment exception service will be available.

If you are affected by this change and have any queries, please contact the Post Office card account Customer Service Centre on 0800 085 7133.

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## SUPPORT WITH RENT PAYMENTS

Whilst some people have remained in employment on their full pay during the last 18 months, COVID-19 has impacted on jobs, whether this has seen a reduction in income due to furlough or a job loss. For those who have less disposable income, there has been a knock-on effect on managing to pay their rent.

The Government made temporary changes to the eviction rules by making landlords unable to evict people who have fallen into rent arrears due to the effect of COVID-19 on their income (they can still evict due to anti-social behaviour, domestic violence or other reasons not related to Covid).

These changes will come to an end at some point over the next few months, dependent on the area

of the UK in which you live. Once the restriction on evictions comes to an end, your tenancy may be at risk if you are not able to pay all of your rent, including any arrears that have built up.

### **What support is available through the benefits system?**

Support is available via Universal Credit or Housing Benefit which are both means-tested benefits. Your income and capital will affect whether you can receive support through one of these benefits. If you are part of a couple, your combined income and capital affects your entitlement.

Universal Credit is for working-age people, whilst Housing Benefit is for people over State Pension age. If you are part of a couple and one of you is below State Pension age and one above, you will need to claim Universal Credit.

For further information on Universal Credit and Housing Benefit, please read on. Following this, if you are considering making a claim for a benefit it is advisable to speak to your Blesma Support Officer beforehand as this information is a guide and the rules can be more complex depending on your individual circumstances.

## **UNIVERSAL CREDIT**

### **What is Universal Credit?**

Universal Credit supports you if you are on a low income whether in or out of work. It includes support for the cost of housing, children and childcare, carers, and people too ill or disabled to work.

It is a means-tested benefit. This means your income and capital will affect your entitlement. Some of your income and capital may be ignored.

### **Who can claim Universal Credit?**

You can apply for Universal Credit if you are in or out of work, and on a low income. You will usually only be able to claim Universal Credit if you are under State

Pension age and aged 18 or over. Some people within this age bracket will be excluded from claiming, such as certain students.

### **How is Universal Credit calculated?**

Universal Credit is a single payment that is made up of different amounts depending on your circumstances.

#### **The calculation will take into account:**

- your earnings if you are working
- your partner's earnings if s/he is working
- any other income that is coming into your household e.g. an occupational pension
- the capital you and your partner have

The amount you get is worked out each month, so may be different from one month to the next if you earn a different amount, or if your circumstances change. Some income may be disregarded within the calculation, such as a War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Guaranteed Income Payment.

There is a capital limit of £16,000, meaning that claimants with capital above this level will not be able to receive a payment of Universal Credit.

### **What is expected of the claimant?**

In return for getting Universal Credit, you will be expected to meet further requirements, such as to look for or prepare for work, unless you are unable to. Claimants will have different responsibilities dependent on their circumstances. If you are unable to work due to ill health or disability, you will have to take part in a Work Capability Assessment to determine the level of further requirements attached to your claim.

### **What does Universal Credit replace?**

Universal Credit replaces:

- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit

## Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care continued

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Housing Benefit

You cannot receive Universal Credit and one of these benefits at the same time. If you receive any of these benefits or tax credits and your circumstances change, you may need to claim Universal Credit instead.

If you are already claiming any of these benefits or tax credits, you will be expected to change to Universal Credit at some stage, whether or not there is a change in your circumstances. The Department for Work and Pensions will get in touch with you before there are changes to your benefits or tax credits.

It is recommended you speak to your Blesma Support Officer before making a claim for Universal Credit. It is a complex benefit made up of different elements. If you are already part of the means-tested benefits system, these benefits may be affected by a Universal Credit claim and you may find yourself worse off.

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### HOUSING BENEFIT

#### What is Housing Benefit?

Unlike Universal Credit, which has a number of different elements, Housing Benefit is a single benefit to support you with your rent costs only. Some of your income and capital may be ignored. Housing Benefit is being replaced by Universal Credit. It is now only available to those who are already receiving it and some new claimants. You cannot receive Housing Benefit and Universal Credit at the same time.

Housing Benefit can help pay your rent if you are unemployed or on a low income. It is a means-tested benefit; this means that your income and capital will affect your entitlement.

#### Who can claim Housing Benefit?

You can only make a new claim for Housing Benefit if any of the following apply:

- You have reached State Pension age
- If you are part of a couple, you must both have reached State Pension age
- You are in supported, sheltered or some types of temporary housing

If you are working age and already receiving Housing Benefit and your circumstances change, you may need to claim Universal Credit instead. You will also be expected to change from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit at some stage, whether or not there is a change in your circumstances. The Department for Work and Pensions will get in touch with you when this applies to you.

#### How is Housing Benefit calculated?

There is no set amount of Housing Benefit. The award will take into account:

- Your earnings if you are working
- Your partner's earnings if they are working
- Any other income that is coming into your household e.g. an occupational pension
- The capital you and your partner have

Some income may be ignored within the calculation. Local Authorities, who administer Housing Benefit, have a discretionary power to disregard War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Guaranteed Income Payment.

There is a capital limit of £16,000, meaning that claimants with capital above this level will not be able to receive a payment of Housing Benefit unless they are in receipt of Pension Guarantee Credit.

# An update from around the Branches

## GREAT YARMOUTH & LOWESTOFT BRANCH SUMMER UPDATE

*Chairman and Welfare Officer:*

*Philip (Bob) Monkhouse*

*Honorary Secretary: Helen Cullen*

*Honorary Treasurer: Simon Cavie*

Welcome to the Great Yarmouth & Lowestoft Branch summer update. We hope our update finds everyone keeping safe and well.

The Branch held its 2021 AGM by post and as there were no objections to the existing Branch committee members, these will continue in post for 2021/22 to support Branch members.

We celebrated our 75th anniversary on 19 August by hosting a lunch event in Great Yarmouth in the afternoon and extended our invitation to Members in the wider East of England region. We made sure we met in a Covid-safe environment and events were somewhat more low-key than we had anticipated.

We also plan to visit the Thursford Christmas Spectacular event on the evening of 25 November. We have a few tickets remaining, so if you are in the area and would like to join us, please do get in touch. It seems a bit too early to mention Christmas, but our Branch members are aware that plans are in place to celebrate in person this year!

We continue to stay in touch with staff from Blesma HQ (Support Officer Kevin Long and Outreach Officer Darren Fuller). We are looking forward to our first face-to-face gathering in almost 18 months, and are conscious that some Members may be wary of coming out of lockdown. We will continue to offer support to those who need it to ensure we all get back to some kind of post-Covid normality.

Branch members are asked to get in touch with a member of the committee if they have any problems, and we will see what we can do to help.

If anyone is interested in joining any Branch events, please contact the chairman, Philip Monkhouse on 07951 292681.

We wish all the Blesma family well and send best wishes for an enjoyable summer.

## BOURNEMOUTH BRANCH UPDATE

All the ships have now left the bay, so we went to Weymouth for our annual Armed Forces Day pilgrimage where they have lots. We met up with Sarah Payne and Steve Fraser, set up our stall and sat there. Normally, the sun is shining and the crowds are out watching the parade, but sadly not this year.

However, it was so nice to be out with friends again. We sat

there and gradually the layers increased as we had coffee and ‘caterpillar cake’ as we celebrated Steve Fraser’s birthday. The total amount raised was £350, which we will share with HQ.

We celebrated release from lockdown on Thursday 29 July at the Miramar Hotel, Bournemouth. We held a very quick election of officers over coffees as we have been unable to hold an AGM for two years, then we had a nice get together.

Jon Bryant, Blesma’s Chief Executive, accepted our invitation to the event and Heather Betts, the Association’s former Director Independence and Wellbeing, was invited to mark her retirement from Blesma.

# Useful contact numbers across the Association

TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
<b>BLESMA SUPPORT OFFICERS</b>			
BSO (Prosthetics)	Brian Chenier	020 8548 7080 07796 715908	bsoprosthetics@blesma.org
BSO Eastern	Kevin Long	020 3954 3020 07825 536364	bsoeastern@blesma.org
BSO London & South East	Steven Burrell	020 7501 3030 07469 242277	bsolse@blesma.org
BSO Midlands	Sam Wileman	020 8548 7095 07825 536363	bsomid@blesma.org
BSO North East	Christine Landess	020 3954 3027 07917 972825	bsone@blesma.org
BSO North West	Mike Downes	01257 795144 07825 536362	bsonw@blesma.org
BSO Scotland, NI & ROI	Steve Burton	07766 258461	bsosniroi@blesma.org
BSO South	Pat Donnachie	020 3954 3026 07741 846106	bsosouth@blesma.org
BSO South West	Steve Fraser	01278 789393 07788 312747	bsosw@blesma.org
BSO West	Tom Hall	020 8548 7098 07780 165085	bsowest@blesma.org
Members Living Overseas	Liz Watling	020 8548 3516	iwabenefits@blesma.org
<b>BLESMA OUTREACH OFFICERS</b>			
Outreach Officer Eastern	Darren Fuller	07741 661159	outreacheastern@blesma.org
Outreach Officer London & South East	Jess Linge	07741 845793	outreachlse@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Midlands	Vanessa Lucas	07741 845429	outreachmid@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Northern Ireland	Fiona Morrison	07741 744617	outreachni@blesma.org
Outreach Officer North East	Adele Miller	07741 847211	outreachne@blesma.org
Outreach Officer North West	Kirsten Morrissey	07741 846674	outreachnw@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Scotland	Emma Gratton	07884 695703	outreachscotland@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South	Andy Barlow	07384 834449	outreachsouth@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South West	Sarah Payne	07741 737563	outreachsw@blesma.org
Outreach Officer West	Jason Suller	07741 744141	outreachwest@blesma.org

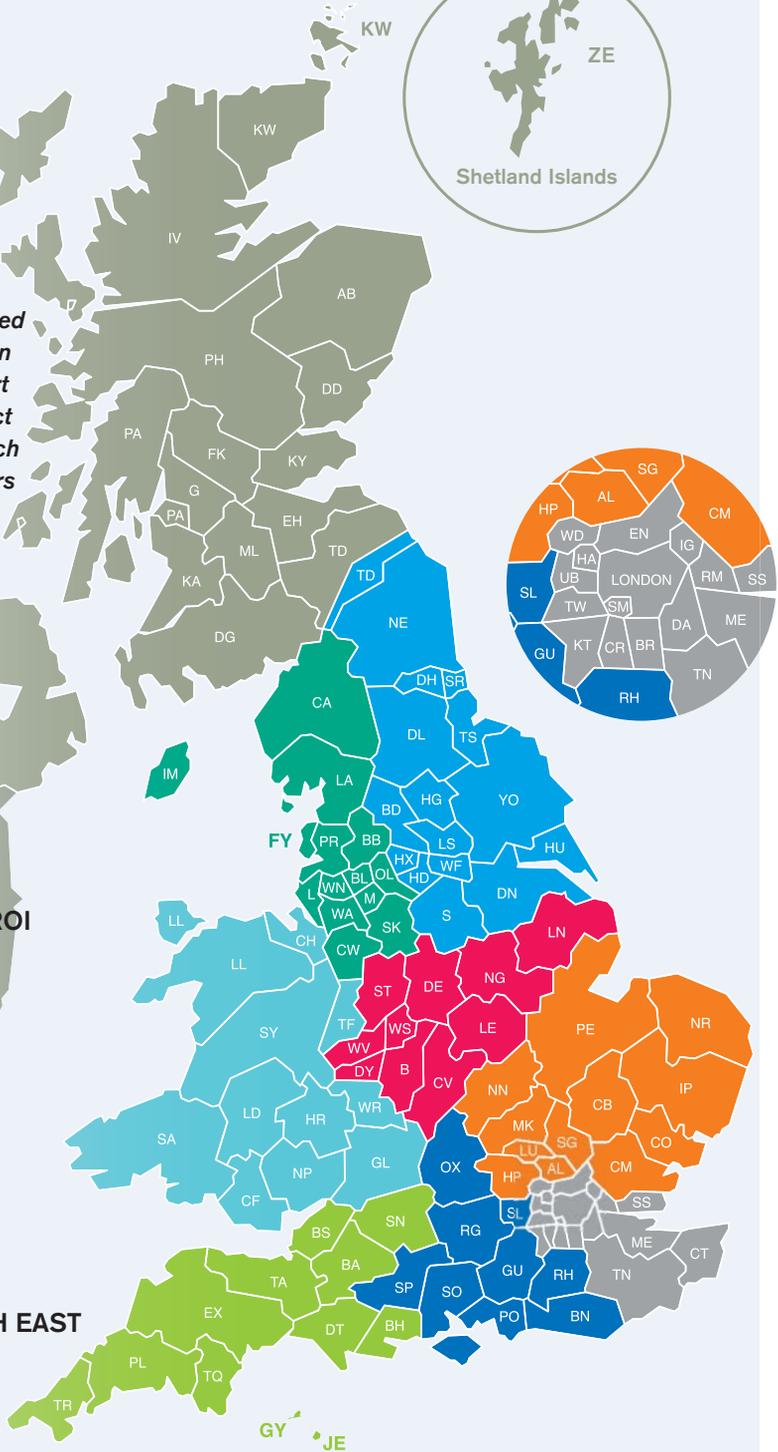
TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
<b>INDEPENDENCE AND WELLBEING</b>			
Benefits and Social Care Advisor	Liz Watling	020 8548 3516	iwabenefits@blesma.org
Members Admin	Elaine Hems	020 8548 7093	memberadmin@blesma.org
Grants Admin	Susie Grainger	020 3954 3022	grantsadmin@blesma.org
Welfare – Direct Line		020 8598 9459	
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>			
Activities Manager	Jess March	020 8548 3519	activities@blesma.org
Membership Engagement Officer	Emily Mizon	020 8548 7094	meo@blesma.org
Activities Executive	Clare Wellings	020 3954 3021	ae@blesma.org
Activities Executive (Local)	Nicole Findlay	020 8548 7097	aelocal@blesma.org
<b>FUNDRAISING</b>			
Head of Fundraising	Anna Scalera	020 8548 3517	hf@blesma.org
Senior Community and Events Officer	Abbie-Louise Mills	020 8548 7089	communityeventsofficersnr@blesma.org
Corporate and Regional Fundraising Manager	Chris Knight	07774 797318	crfm@blesma.org
Senior Corporate Partnership Officer	Abbi Wilkins	020 8548 7084	scfo@blesma.org
Database Manager	Julie Hitchcock	020 8548 7088	dbmanager@blesma.org
<b>COMMUNICATIONS</b>			
Communications Manager	Lorna Dorrell	020 3954 3023	commsmgr@blesma.org
Stories, Content and Press Officer	Jess Mackinnon	020 8548 3514	storiesandpress@blesma.org
Digital Media Manager	Nick Tuck	01299 896282	digitalmedia@blesma.org
Communications Executive	Izzy Perks	020 8548 7092	commsexec@blesma.org
<b>DIRECTORS</b>			
Chief Executive	Jon Bryant	020 8548 3512	ce@blesma.org
Operations Director	Tony Bloomfield	020 8548 3513	od@blesma.org
Director Independence and Wellbeing	Ian Harper	020 8548 3515	diw@blesma.org
<b>USEFUL CONTACTS</b>			
<b>Main Office</b>		<b>020 8590 1124</b>	<b>info@blesma.org</b>
<b>HR and Facilities Manager</b>	<b>Martin Gwillim</b>	<b>020 8548 3511</b>	<b>hrf@blesma.org</b>
<b>IT and Admin Support Officer</b>	<b>Ivona Andrejsova</b>	<b>020 8548 7091</b>	<b>itas@blesma.org</b>

# Blesma by area

*Have you got a question or need advice? Don't hesitate to get in touch with the Blesma Support Officer in your area. The contact numbers for all BSOs, Outreach Officers, and relevant members of staff can be found on p34.*



- SCOTLAND, NI AND ROI
- NORTH WEST
- NORTH EAST
- EASTERN
- MIDLANDS
- WEST
- SOUTH
- SOUTH WEST
- LONDON AND SOUTH EAST



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