

# Blesma

The magazine for limbless and injured veterans | Autumn 2024

**PLUS:**

MEET BLESMA'S  
NEW CHAIRMAN

THE VMF EXPLAINED

THE FIVE-YEAR  
STRATEGIC PLAN

MEMBERS' WEEKEND

**BULLETIN INSIDE**



**THE TIPS AND  
TECHNIQUES FOR  
MAKING THE MOST  
OF YOUR MEDICAL  
APPOINTMENTS**

## **BLESMA SET TO HIT NATION'S TV SCREENS**

**GO BEHIND THE SCENES AS THE ASSOCIATION  
FILMS ITS FIRST-EVER TELEVISION AD CAMPAIGN**

**PLUS: ALL THE NEWS AND VIEWS FROM ACROSS THE ASSOCIATION**



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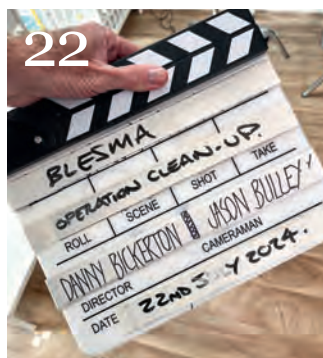
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**EDITORIAL** If you have a story you'd like to put in the next issue, or if you'd like to get in touch to let us know what you think of this issue, drop us a line at [editor@blesma.org](mailto:editor@blesma.org)



Please send any written correspondence to the Blesma office at:  
115 New London Road, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 0QT

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Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Andy Bate

## Five-year strategy defines the Association's vision out to 2029

BLESMA'S ROLLING STRATEGIC PLAN FOCUSES ON STABILITY IN A DIFFICULT ECONOMIC CLIMATE AND IS PLANNED TO BE A "QUIET EVOLUTION RATHER THAN A REVOLUTION"

**B**lesma has reconfirmed its commitment to providing Members with support for life in a new five-year strategy designed to ensure stability in the challenging economic climate.

The Board of Trustees' Strategic Plan 2024-2029 reaffirms that the Association's distinguishing purpose is to assist Members to live independent and fulfilling lives, with support guaranteed for life.

Poor economic growth and a difficult fundraising environment have created the need for a slight

shift of emphasis away from more exotic, expensive and individual activities to basic principles that support Members and their families.

Outgoing Chairman General Sir Adrian Bradshaw told the AGM, which approved the five-year rolling plan, that it represented a "quiet evolution rather than a revolution".

He said: "Our defining purpose is to assist our Members to live independent and fulfilling lives. Blesma will be distinguished by a fellowship of shared experience. Blesma will exploit knowledge of the

experience and Blesma will inspire. It will be about the celebration and realisation of potential. At the same time, it will bring comfort and will be there for life. That is very important."

The 2022 Members' Survey, which helped formulate the 2024-2029 strategy, provided a clear message that Members' overwhelming priorities were mobility support and physical health, followed by social activities and social inclusion.

The Association has developed a more sustainable business model that, set against a backdrop of

**Above: In the first part of 2024 there was a 37% increase in face-to-face meetings with Members**

# Welcome

## “THE BOARD HAS LISTENED TO WHAT MEMBERS ASKED FOR IN THE SURVEY AND HAS RESPONDED TO THEM”

reduced fundraising, will ensure the mission of supporting Members, often with increasing complex needs, for life.

“This does not mean spending less on Members but means adopting a more balanced approach which will underpin our commitment to current needs as well as help us stop operating at a deficit,” said Chief Executive Vivienne Buck.

“The Board has listened to what the Members asked for in the survey and has responded to them and the economic environment. It has previously directed a more rigorous focus on the basics, more lower cost activities and more personal, face-to-face contact with Members. In the first part of 2024 there was a 37% increase in face-to-face meetings with Members, which will continue.”

Blesma will also continue to collaborate with other military charities to innovate in fundraising, research and service provision, and will regularly review opportunities to benefit Members and their families.

For more visit [www.blesma.org/news-media/publications](http://www.blesma.org/news-media/publications)



General Sir Adrian Bradshaw addressing this year's AGM in June



The last few months have been extremely busy. The Members' Weekend took place in Lincolnshire this year, and you can read more about the numerous activities, the gala dinner, this year's awards and key points from the Annual General Meeting in this issue.

During the AGM, General Sir Adrian Bradshaw stood down after serving as our Chairman for six years. I wish to extend our thanks and gratitude to Sir Adrian for his loyal commitment to Blesma, guiding the organisation through a period of uncertainty including the pandemic and economic instability, championing our Members, and leaving Blesma in a position of strength. He hands the Chair's baton over to Ed Davis, a former Royal Marines officer.

Colin Rouse, one of our Member Trustees, has stood down after 16 years on the Board. A big thank you to Colin for his years of dedicated service and valuable contribution to Blesma. He has always put the Members first. In his place, Lisa Johnston has been voted in as a Member Trustee. Lisa is an active Member within the Blesma community, participating in and running events in the North West. We also welcome Ian Johnson, the new Director Independence and Wellbeing, who joins us after nine years with the RAF Benevolent Fund. He brings with him a wealth of experience in grants and welfare. You can read more about Colin and Ian in this issue.

Another significant change is how the new Government intends to manage veterans' affairs. In July, the Prime Minister's written ministerial statement announced that the Office for Veterans' Affairs will move from the Cabinet Office to the Ministry of Defence. This change will enable the Minister for Veterans and People to have oversight for the entirety of service life – from training to veteran – working with government departments to deliver for service personnel. The new Minister for Veterans and People is Alistair Carns.

On 29 June, the Board endorsed the new Blesma Strategy that will take us through the next five years to 2029. The Strategic Intent is to continue to be the principal Association for the service disabled of limb and be there for Members for life. Its defining purpose is to assist its Members to live independent and fulfilling lives. Operating in the context of poor economic growth, a difficult fundraising environment, and the fact that Blesma has been operating at a deficit since 2020 means Blesma must now operate within a clear set of priorities to move from operating at a deficit to a surplus by 2029. You can read more about the strategy (left).

I hope you enjoy the issue.

**Vivienne Buck CBE**  
Chief Executive





Photography: Tom Wharton

## Blesma 100 brings people together for a purpose

**T**he Blesma 100 Bike Ride powered through its ninth annual outing recently, with more than 50 military veterans taking to the roads of North Yorkshire in the name of Blesma.

The riders, featuring Members, injured veterans and serving personnel, enjoyed the camaraderie of the group ride that took in some of the region's picturesque villages.

"We had an excellent route through stunning countryside in great weather," said organiser Jonathan Bell, a Blesma Member and ambassador. "It encourages veterans to ride because they are part of a group with shared experiences and values.

"Many of those who rode with us had never been out on a bike before being

introduced to the Blesma 100. There is a shorter course of about 50 miles for those who don't want to do the 100; everyone is welcome and well looked after."

Each year, the event alternates between fundraising and awareness raising, and Jonathan and the team co-ordinated social media and outreach activities this year to spread the word about Blesma's work.

"It is a reunion of sorts for my regiment, but we attract a wide range of serving and former military personnel who enjoy that feeling of togetherness and shared purpose," said Jonathan, who served in the Green Howards.

Jonathan is now planning a special tenth anniversary Blesma 100 for 2025.



## "I FEEL PRIVILEGED TO BE ABLE TO DO THESE KINDS OF THINGS"

BLESMA SUPPORTER MARK SINCLAIR has raised almost £735 for the Association by completing the 100km London 2 Brighton Ultra Challenge in May.

"I spent nine years in the New Zealand Army, so when I was looking through the list of approved charities for the event, I was keen to find something military related," said Mark. "I saw Blesma and thought that it was an amazing cause. I was impressed by the charity's history, which stretches all the way back to WWI, and thought about how many veterans it must have helped in that time."

Mark adopted a punishing training schedule in the run-up to the event and completed the course in 12 hours 31 minutes, finishing 26th overall.

"I've been missing this kind of challenge since I left the Army, and I feel privileged to be able to do these kinds of things and raise money and awareness for veterans who had physical capabilities taken away from them," he said.



## FIDDLE LOVERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND DIG DEEP FOR BLESMA

A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SCOTTISH Fiddle Orchestra has raised almost £800 for Blesma. Collections were held over a weekend during the orchestra's mini tour of small theatres across Northern Ireland by the Entertainment Events Organisation.

"The orchestra is a charity, so it was a delight to partner with them and to raise so much for the Association," said Fiona Morrison, NI Outreach Officer.



# Free runner Mat takes his climbing to new heights

**M**at Armitage is scaling the heights of the para climbing world and has his eyes set on the 2028 Paralympics in Los Angeles. The sport has just been selected for its debut at the Games in four years' time, and it coincides with the former REME armourer's rise up the ranks of the indoor climbing disciplines.

"I entered my first competition at the British Championships last September and got a bronze medal and an invite to the GB squad, which was great," said Mat, a former professional free runner who shattered his ankle in a motorbike accident that led to him having an amputation.

The 33 year old is now immersing himself in the highly technical sport and entered the International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) competition in Salt Lake City in the USA, where he placed eighth in a vastly experienced field.



Mat, who trains at The Boardroom Climbing in Queensferry, North Wales, has been funded by Blesma as he continues to make progress and hopes to rise even higher in the 2024 British Championships in September.

"I absolutely love it and it gives me a real sense of purpose," he said. "The LA Paralympics are something to aim at and I'm working hard on my fitness and developing the climbing intelligence you need to read and react to the wall's complex routes.

"My background helps with a lot of the moves as I know how to move my body, and a lot of this involves stability and pressing from one

movement into another deliberately. "I'm grateful to Blesma for helping me with funding, and I'm working hard on my strength, conditioning and technical ability to place higher in the next competitions and get a place on the GB team."

## News in brief

### GLASGOW FUNDRAISERS DO A GRAND JOB

A bucket collection at Glasgow Central Station with 10 volunteers raised £980 in a 12-hour shift from 7am to 7pm on 31 July. A big thanks to the team, who are scheduled to be back at the station on 25 September.

### EVERY LITTLE HELPS AT SHOP FUNDRAISER

Member John Wakeman, who works for Tesco, organised for Blesma to have a collection at the Colchester Highwoods branch. Staffed by Nike Ely, Stuart Ellis and other Members, it raised £985.

### MUD, SWEAT AND CHEERS DURING MALDON RUN

The Maldon Mud Run attracts more than 20,000 people, who come to watch teams wrestle their way across 500m of thick mud on the bed of the River Blackwater, in Essex. Two volunteers took the plunge for Blesma at this year's run, while the Association also had a stand at the event.



## GOT A STORY? GET IN TOUCH!

Have you got a story you'd like to tell? Want some help publicising a trip, event or expedition you're planning? To put your story in the magazine, just get in touch with us at [editor@blesma.org](mailto:editor@blesma.org)

## NEWS ANALYSIS

# Sir Adrian hands over as Blesma Chairman

GENERAL SIR ADRIAN BRADSHAW HAS STEERED BLESMA THROUGH TOUGH GLOBAL TIMES ENSURING LIEUTENANT GENERAL ED DAVIS INHERITS AN ASSOCIATION IN GREAT SHAPE

**T**his year's Members' Weekend, which took place in June, saw a changing of the guard as General Sir Adrian Bradshaw KCB OBE DL completed six years as Chairman of the Association and handed the honour to Lieutenant General Ed Davis CB CBE, former Commandant General of the Royal Marines. General Sir Adrian has steered Blesma through the difficult Covid period with professionalism and compassion, and he told Members to expect more of the same from his former comrade. *Blesma Magazine* caught up with the outgoing and incoming Chairmen during Members' Weekend...

### GENERAL SIR ADRIAN BRADSHAW

General Sir Adrian has served around the world in the British Army, with posts commanding the King's Royal Hussars and a specialist military unit as well as being Deputy Commander of the 14,000-strong NATO-led force in Afghanistan in 2011 and Commander UK Land Forces in 2013.

#### How would you sum up your time with Blesma?

It's been the most amazing experience and a great honour – I have enjoyed the privilege of being Chairman. I immediately found Blesma to be an extraordinary embracing group of folks united by a common experience who were all determined to make each other's lives better. It is unique as a charity.

#### You had to navigate some tough times, how difficult has that been?

We faced challenges, but the Board of Trustees has been brilliant throughout, and the Member Trustees have brought critical insights during the storms in recent years. We've had to take some tough decisions on the strategic direction and focus, and I think those changes will help Blesma survive into the future.

**Right: General Sir Adrian Bradshaw (left) welcomes new Blesma Chairman Lieutenant General Ed Davis to the role**

#### What will you miss most about the Association?

The Members' Weekend because it is a focal point of everyone's efforts to keep this organisation vibrant and healthy. You always go away elated with that sense of comradeship and everybody coming together. It's the most wonderful experience, so I really will miss them, but I guess I won't be excluded from coming along even if I'm not Chairman.

#### Will it be a wrench not to be involved in Blesma business?

After the last Board meeting, I rang my wife and told her that was my last. She asked if that was a sad moment, and it was. There is something about this organisation, not just the individuals but the collective, which creates a very strong bond. But the timing is right and we have the right candidate to take over.

#### How important has it been to hand over the chairmanship to a former comrade?

The then-Blesma Chairman General Sir Cedric Delves KBE DSO, a much-respected commander of mine, asked if I wanted to take over from him when I was retiring from the Army. Having spent the previous couple of decades with friends and comrades in Iraq and Afghanistan, and having seen a lot of people suffer limb injuries in particular, it was an opportunity I seized. My role as outgoing Chairman was to find someone I could absolutely trust who would relish the opportunity and be devoted to the job. Ed and I have served closely together and know each other well. It may seem like an old boys' network, but in military service you learn who you can trust, and when you are back-to-back in difficult circumstances you learn that.

#### What will Lieutenant General Ed bring to the role?

Being Chairman is a small part of a big engine, but it is an important part and I wouldn't hand it over





Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Andy Bate

to anyone I wasn't assured would take it forward in the right way and make the right decisions collectively with the Board. Ed has got exactly the right approach to life, and his wisdom will help the board collectively to come to the right decisions on behalf of the Members.

**Will you still be involved with Blesma?**

The Chairman's reins are now firmly in Ed's hands, but I will always keep in touch with what is happening in the Association, and through my role as Governor of the Royal Hospital Chelsea there is clearly a cross-over as we have Members as In-Pensioners and hope more will join us in the future. Blesma will always be close to me.

**LIEUTENANT GENERAL ED DAVIS**

Lieutenant General Ed served for 34 years in Naval Service before taking on the role of Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Gibraltar from 2016 until 2020. He served in the Royal Marines and became Commanding Officer of a specialist military unit. He led 3 Commando Brigade, including commanding a multi-national Task Force Helmand, Afghanistan, before becoming Commandant General of the Royal Marines.

**How did you hear about the up-coming role of Blesma Chairman?**

I was General Sir Adrian's Chief of Staff when he was Director in the MoD, and we served in NATO together and are good friends. I was lucky enough to be approached by him about the role and didn't have to think very long about it.

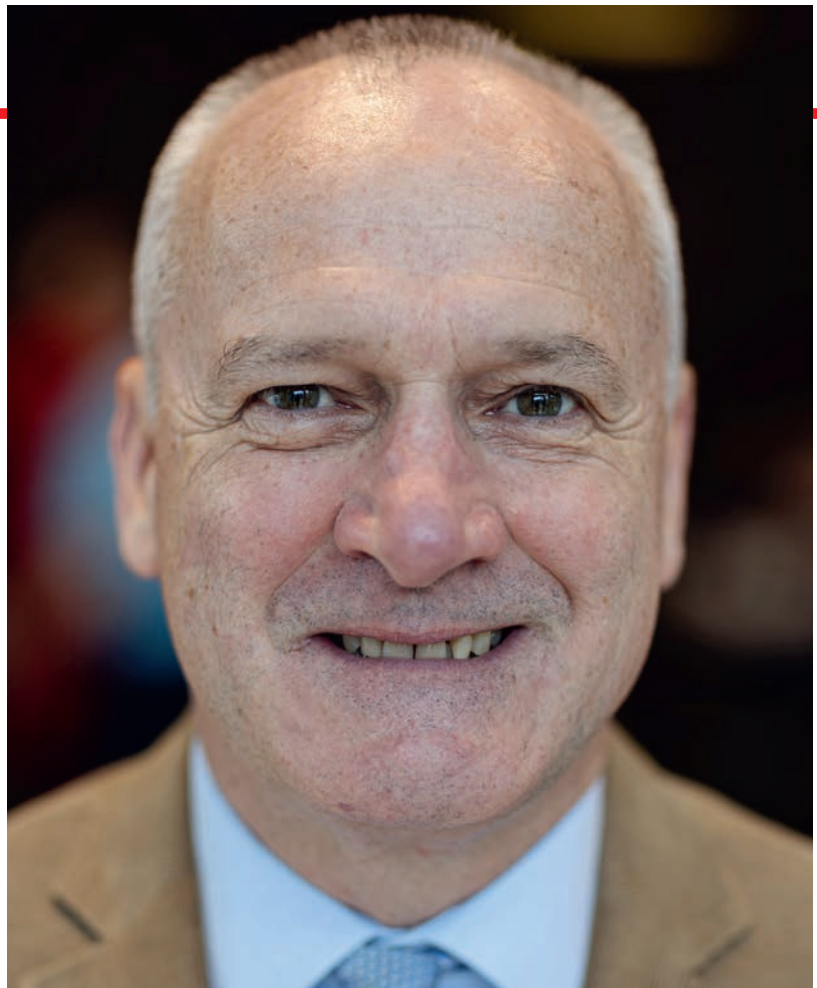
**Did you know much about Blesma before?**

I was familiar with the Association and the good work it does, but as I am finding out, that was only really scraping the surface. I also knew General Cedric very well and was aware of his great work as Chairman, previously. When I was Task Force Commander in Helmand we suffered 16 limb losses during our six-month tour, so Blesma has always been a part of the vital support network for those brave men and women.

**What did General Sir Adrian tell you about the role?**

The main thing is that Blesma is a community of the Members, for the Members and is, in large part, run

**“I like to think I can focus my experience of running organisations to help take Blesma forward and deal with the challenges ahead”**



Lieutenant General Ed Davis was voted in as Blesma's new Chairman at this year's AGM in June

by the Members. It is a community that understands about people who have lost limbs and the use of limbs, and enables them as a community to deal with the challenges that life throws at them, helping them to lead happy and fulfilled lives.

**What do you hope to achieve?**

I want to follow the work of General Cedric and General Sir Adrian by walking in their footsteps. I inherit a great legacy. Through caring for the Blesma community, I would like to think that I can focus my experience of running organisations to help take it forward and deal with the challenges ahead. We are living in times where money is short for everybody, and we need to make sure we can generate the funds to continue to support this great community. I am excited about a role through which, in a small way, I can help make a big difference to the lives of the Members and their families.

**Tells us a bit more about your life outside work?**

I'm married to my loving and very tolerant wife, Lorraine, who worked for British Airways until last May. She was incredibly supportive as the wife of the Governor in Gibraltar, an important role in itself, and she is looking forward to this chapter in our lives; our Blesma chapter. We enjoy walking together and I have just taken up fly-fishing, although at the moment that mainly involves pulling flies out of trees rather than catching any fish!

## WILL THREE BE THE MAGIC NUMBER FOR BLESMA AT AWARDS?

CONGRATULATIONS TO MEMBERS Hari Budha Magar, James Hill and Andy Reid who have been shortlisted for the 2024 Soldiering On Awards. Hari and Andy have been nominated in the Inspiration Award category, while James has been shortlisted for the Animal Partnership Award.

Hari lost both his legs to an IED while serving with the Royal Gurkha Rifles in Afghanistan in 2010, and became the first double above-knee amputee to summit Mount Everest in 2023. Andy, a triple amputee who served in 3rd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment, has dedicated his life to inspiring others through motivational speaking and fundraising by completing tough challenges. He also established the Standing Tall Foundation in 2020 which promotes physical and mental wellbeing and provides free support services.

James 'Jimmy' Hill has been shortlisted for setting up a canine rehabilitation service. The former Royal Marines Commando was inspired to create the sanctuary after being medically discharged having lost his Military Working Dog on the same operation in Afghanistan in which he was also seriously injured.

"It is fantastic that the three Members have been shortlisted, and the recognition is thoroughly deserved," said Tony Bloomfield, Blesma's Operations Director.

The 36 finalists in 12 categories were celebrated at a House of Lords reception in July, and the winners will be announced at the Soldiering On Awards on 16 October.



Photography: sportograf.com

## Matt crosses the finish first in tough conditions

**M**att Kingston claimed first place in the para athlete category of a half Ironman in Jönköping, Sweden, in July. The former Royal Marine completed the 1.2-mile swim, 56-mile bike ride and half marathon in a time of five hours 54 minutes and 21 seconds.

"Over the last 10 months I have basically trained five days a week so I was pretty comfortable that I would complete it, but the winds were very challenging and a few competitors were blown off their bikes!" said the 39 year old from Market

Harborough, who had a below-knee amputation after being shot in close combat fighting in Afghanistan in 2007.

"After I lost my leg, I put on weight and the extra pounds were creating complications for my socket and stump. Training for events helped everything click into place. Being disciplined and having a training regime has helped me keep the weight off and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

"My injuries aren't as severe as some, but having physical goals really benefits my physical health and mental wellbeing."

## FLYING HIGH FOR THE ASSOCIATION

SURGEON GREG WYNN HAS TAKEN TO the skies in daredevil fashion to complete a wing walk for Blesma. The co-President of the Colchester Medical Society was strapped to the wing of a bi-plane to mark the organisation's 250th anniversary.

"You are strapped into a metal rig just above the propeller, with a three-point harness for security. It is like the most thrilling roller coaster ride," said Greg, who is based at Colchester Hospital.

"The Society is one of the oldest in the country, and as part of our anniversary year we are supporting institutions in our local area," said Greg. "Colchester Garrison has a proud history, and as Blesma is a local charity we wanted to raise money for those people who have suffered a disability through serving their country and risking their lives for others."

Greg's exhilarating wing walk raised more than £1,600 for the Association.



## WIDOWS ARE 'THE WHEELS WITHIN THE WHEELS' AT BLESMA

BLESMA WIDOWS WERE ALL SMILES at Members' Weekend as they reunited with friends and made new ones. A strong network of Widows has developed through the Association's activities calendar, online groups and the two organised Widows Weeks that take place every year.

"It was absolutely super to get together at Members' Weekend as we are from all parts of the country. We are all ages and from all sorts of backgrounds, but we share something fantastic through Blesma," said Coral Mackenzie, a former nurse.

"I was pleasantly surprised I was still a member of Blesma after my husband died, and it has opened the door to new, lasting friendships and the opportunity to attend events. We are all supportive of each other and, through our life experiences, we can offer help and advice to younger Widows and other Members.

"My advice to any Blesma Widow is to apply for the activities and join the online clubs. They are great fun and are a safe



**Blesma Widows from across the country were reunited at Members' Weekend**

place to share experiences; we have been able to signpost some Widows and new Members to the Support and Outreach Officers to get the help they need. We are the wheels within the wheels of Blesma!"

Blesma Widows now make up almost a third of the membership. "Blesma recognises that Widows are an important part of the Association and it only strengthens the feeling of family we get from being Members," added Coral.

Lexi is going for her fifth world record this month



## Lexi's ready to take on her biggest challenge yet

**L**exi Chambers relishes a challenge, and they don't come much bigger than 35 wheelchair marathons in 35 days. The former Royal Signals soldier spent August finishing a gruelling training regime as she prepared to tackle the 842 miles from John o' Groats to Land's End in September. Along the way, she will face gusting headwinds, driving rain, climbs that would challenge Tour de France cyclists, and extreme fatigue as she aims to bag her fifth world record.

All this in a regulation issue, non-sports wheelchair against a backdrop of Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS) that has been a constant in her life for 10 years.

"The thought of doing this popped into my head just after having my amputation," said Lexi, whose service was cut short when hammer toe surgery caused debilitating CRPS that resulted in her having an elective

amputation. The CRPS returned, along with fibromyalgia and neuromas in her stump.

"I've been doing five marathons a week for my training, and I have to look after my diet and nutrition closely as I burn between 3,000 to 4,000 calories in each marathon.

"I'm going to face some steep climbs, so on those days I won't be able to cover a marathon distance, but on other stages I will do about 50km. It will be a challenge, but I've trained hard both physically and to make it more manageable mentally."

Lexi is supported by her partner, Cat, and a back-up team of friends as well as supporters of Exeter Chiefs Women rugby team. She will be visiting rugby clubs along the route to raise awareness of the sport.

"This is a daunting challenge, but I want to show what can be done and pay back the wonderful help I've had from Blesma and others," said Lexi.



## The sky's the limit for Luke as training ramps up

**L**uke Sinnott (above right) is on course to become perhaps the only double amputee commercial pilot in the world. The former Royal Engineers captain, who was injured by an IED in Afghanistan in 2010, already has a private pilot's licence and is now on an intensive programme of study and flying experience to achieve the highest rating.

Luke has been accepted by Wings for Warriors, a charity that helps ex-service personnel become professional pilots. "Blesma helped with the training to get my private pilot's licence," said Luke. "This training will probably take another year,

and then I will have to get signed off to fly commercial aircraft. People have suggested I might be the first double amputee pilot since Sir Douglas Bader, and I can certainly appreciate how challenging it must have been for him to fly post injury."

Douglas Bader was a WWII fighter pilot despite losing his legs in a pre-war crash. After WWII, he worked as a commercial pilot. Luke has worked with his prosthetist on his sockets and prosthetics to enable him to use all an aircraft's modern controls.

"Flying has played a big part in my rehabilitation and I'm looking forward to the next stage," Luke added.

## FALKLANDS WORK IN ART EXHIBITION

A STRIKING IMAGE OF A ROYAL MARINE created by Member Steve McNeice to commemorate the 40th anniversary of The Falklands War has won a headline spot at *The Seeds of Hope: A New Dawn* exhibition.

The piece, which uses watercolour on card, paint, inks and resin on wood, was selected for inclusion by The Art Project supported by The Soldier's Art Academy. The London exhibition runs until the end of October and features work by 53 artists.

"There are lots of subliminal messages within the work that show there is a



complexity to those returning from conflict who often have many visible and invisible conditions," said Steve. Another of Steve's pieces – a powerful pencil sketch charting his rehabilitation journey from double amputation to walking on prosthetics – also features in the exhibition.

"I am delighted they were both chosen for the exhibition, and I've had an offer from someone to buy the rehab journey drawing," said Steve.

## QUEENIE CELEBRATES 101<sup>ST</sup> BIRTHDAY

BLESMA WIDOW QUEENIE SMITH celebrated her 101st birthday with friends and family in July, as she shared stories and fond memories of her Royal Marines husband Frank, who served in WWII.

Queenie, who was born in Torquay, worked in a munitions factory and as a 'clippie' on the buses in Plymouth during the war. She met Frank, who served in the Atlantic, Africa and Burma, on the way to a dance, and the couple married in 1945.

Frank's military career was cut short by a motorbike accident in which he lost a leg, and he was medically discharged in 1952. He worked in the Civil Service and passed

away in 1988, aged 67. The couple had two children and Queenie, who lives in a nursing home in Devonport, now has seven great grandchildren.

"Mum has a lot of stories and has had a full and interesting life," said her son, Mike. "She was an Avon Lady – she was the longest serving rep in Plymouth – and she used to love gardening. It was great to celebrate such a milestone."

Sarah Payne, BSO South West (pictured with Queenie) added: "Queenie is a real character, she is as bright as a button and loves telling stories. It was an honour to celebrate her 101st birthday with her."



Words: Danny Buckland

## ↘ BLESMA BRIEFING

# Get the most out of your care plan

MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS CAN FEEL DAUNTING, BUT A BIT OF PREPARATION CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE TO BOTH THE SESSION AND THE OUTCOME



**T**ime with clinicians of any speciality is limited, so getting the most out of your appointments is crucial. The following advice can be useful when preparing to attend any clinical appointment, whether that be with your GP or a specialist service.

There is a growing emphasis on patients taking control of their healthcare journeys. Many outpatient services now use a system of patient-initiated follow-up appointments (PIFU) which put you in control of making future appointments. The process works well for many people, but you should discuss any concerns with your GP or specialist before making decisions.

Keeping a journal will help you keep track of your healthcare needs and outcomes. Various health apps and more general journalling apps are available for smartphones, tablets and laptops, but a good old notebook or diary can work just as well. The advantage of using a digital journal is that you should be able to share that via email with your healthcare provider. Another way to take more control of your healthcare is to use the NHS app. The following information is taken from NHS Online.

### ABOUT THE NHS APP

The NHS app gives a simple and secure way to access a range of NHS services. It can be downloaded on your smartphone or tablet via Google Play or the App Store. You can also access the same services in a web browser by logging in through the NHS website.

You must be aged 13 or over to use the NHS app. You also need to be registered with a GP surgery in England or the Isle of Man. A limited app is available for those in Scotland. Wales has a similar app which can be accessed by searching for 'NHS Wales app' on your web browser. There currently isn't a version for Northern Ireland.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH THE NHS APP

You need to prove who you are to get full access to the NHS app. With full access you can:

- order repeat prescriptions and nominate a pharmacy where you would like to collect them
- book and manage appointments
- view your GP health record to see information such as your allergies and medicines
- use NHS 111 online to answer questions and get instant advice or medical help near you

Before proving who you are, you can use the app to:

- search trusted NHS information and advice on hundreds of conditions and treatments
- find NHS services near you

### OTHER SERVICES

Depending on your GP surgery or hospital, you may be able to use the NHS app to:

- contact your GP surgery using an online form
- access services on behalf of someone you care for
- view and manage hospital and other appointments
- view useful links your doctor or health professional has shared with you
- view and manage care plans

### TOP TIPS FOR MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR APPOINTMENTS

**Prepare for your appointment.** Make sure you are available and can get to your appointment in good time. Check if you have to bring anything (such as samples) or details of any home tests (blood pressure, for example) or a list of current medication.

**Maintain a diary/journal.** Keeping a track of your condition or health issues can help to prepare for any appointments. It can also help to monitor any changes, progress or key issues. This can be very

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**TIME WITH CLINICIANS OF ANY SPECIALITY IS LIMITED, SO GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR APPOINTMENT IS CRUCIAL**



helpful for prosthetics issues, changes in stump shape, fit of a prosthesis, location and types of sores or rubbing. Note anything that impacts positively or negatively on the use of the prosthesis. Keep a record and track medication (including dosage and timings). **Ask who will be there.** Finding out who is expected to be there can help you prepare any questions you might want to ask and avoid any missed opportunities or sense of being overwhelmed.

**Consider taking a family member.** Medical appointments can be daunting, and often a lot of information is given. Having a family member (or a trusted friend) to hear the information can help to ensure that any key messages are not forgotten after the appointment.

**Prepare any questions you have ahead of time.** Taking time to write down any questions you have before the appointment will help ensure you get to ask them. This is very important for you, but it can be just as important for your clinicians to be able to understand what matters to you.

**Ask your questions.** This sounds obvious, but it can be easy to get sidetracked and miss the opportunity. Preparing, as above, will help this.

**Take notes.** The appointment is important to you, so taking notes (or asking a family member or friend to take them) can be very helpful. It will enable you to really make sure you have heard everything that you

**It is your health being discussed, so don't be afraid to take notes or ask questions**

“**ASK YOUR QUESTIONS. THIS SOUNDS OBVIOUS, BUT IT CAN BE EASY TO GET SIDETRACKED AND MISS THE OPPORTUNITY**”

are being told and to be able to reflect on that information later. Don't be afraid to do this or feel intimidated; it is your health that is being discussed. It is important to let the clinicians know that you intend to take notes as this is considerate and polite. Recording details of medications is very important and will help you to take medicines as prescribed. **Focus on what is most important.** Try to remain focused on what the appointment is for. Some additional conversation related to the condition or procedure being discussed can be very helpful, but try to avoid unnecessary chat.

**Have a copy of the questions or information.** Leaving a copy of your questions or prepared notes with the clinical team can be helpful and will allow them to add them to your notes for future reference. **Keep calm.** Health professionals are there to do their job. It is very unhelpful to get angry with them. All patients and staff are expected to behave in an acceptable, respectful manner. The practice follows the NHS guidance concerning zero tolerance. Any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

*If you would like to get in touch with your Support or Outreach Officer, or the relevant member of staff in Chelmsford, their contact details can be found on p68*



# Saturday 9th November 2024

## Run to Remember, anywhere any time

Registration: £10.00

Registration includes:

- Race number
- Blesma Laces
- Fundraising Pack

Raise £100 and you will receive a Blesma T-shirt

 Finishers Prize:  
Remembrance 11k Medal



## How to take part:



Visit our webpage to register: [blesma.org/remembrance11k](https://blesma.org/remembrance11k)



Set up a fundraising page via the Enthuse platform



Connect your Strava



Join our Facebook community page to share your training and progress



Run 11k your way



## Spotlight On...

# Colin Rouse



**B**lesma's longest-serving Trustee, Colin Rouse, stepped down at the AGM after 16 years to resounding thanks from fellow Board members and the wider membership.

The RAF veteran, who was awarded an MBE for his voluntary work with the Association, has served with three different Chairmen and four Chief Executives during his tenure.

Outgoing Chairman General Sir Adrian Bradshaw described Colin as an "absolute stalwart" of the board who brought the voice of Members and a range of insights to his duties. "I have valued his support, advice, comradeship and friendship, and the time and effort that he put into his work on the board is deserving of special recognition," General Sir Adrian told those who attended this year's AGM.

Colin was injured whilst on board a yacht that exploded while on a training exercise with the Joint Services in 1999, resulting in a traumatic amputation of his leg. He refused to let the injury restrict his passion for seafaring and was soon involved in offshore yacht racing with Blesma. Later, he pioneered inclusive ski trips in the US and Europe for Members.

"I didn't really go into a rehab phase because I came straight from skippering a boat for the Joint Services and then got back on one again skippering for Blesma,

and I was in awe of the Members," said Colin, from Hampshire. "I was supposed to be leading them because of my ocean sailing experience but they led me as they were the experienced amputees, and it was quite a steep learning curve."

Colin has led Blesma crews in the Fastnet Race, Cowes Week competitions and three challenging Transatlantic races.

"Blesma Members were incredible on every single trip with their amazing can-do attitude. We always sailed on non-adapted boats so there was a lot to contend with, but the teams just got on with it. Every Member had that spirit, and the one who embodied it the most was Paul Burns, a Warrenpoint survivor who had very bad injuries. No matter what pain he was in, he would always help everybody and was a real credit to Blesma. It was a massive loss when he passed."

**"I saw my role on the Board as being the voice of the Members. We have to include everybody"**

Colin championed all-inclusive activities regardless of disability, and he was instrumental in organising and running the popular La Plagne ski trips. It wasn't long before he was approached to join the Board of Trustees.

"I was honoured, and I accepted as I was more than willing to give back because of what Blesma had given me.

"I saw my role on the Board as being the voice of the Members. I had a motto which I would often quote in discussions; 'If it isn't helping the Members, why are we doing it?' and if a project was benefitting one particular section of the membership, I would ask what we were doing for the rest of the Members. We have to include everybody because that's what we are; a group of injured military people, a family.

"I've had plenty of intense discussions and some strong arguments during my time on the Board, but it was my job to put forward the views of the Members. But I will miss the feeling of everyone striving to do their best for the Members and also the banter of Board meetings.

"The opportunity to get together, like we did in the military, is a vital part of Blesma wherever it happens within the organisation. I will miss being on the Board but I will be busy with lots of projects, and I am still a Member."

## NEWS ANALYSIS

# “My role is to deliver what Members want”

HAVING WORKED AT THE RAF BENEVOLENT FUND FOR ALMOST A DECADE, IAN JOHNSON IS BRINGING A WEALTH OF MILITARY CHARITY EXPERIENCE TO HIS NEW ROLE AT BLESMA

**T**he Association’s new Director Independence and Wellbeing Ian Johnson was given the perfect introduction to Blesma when Members’ Weekend took place within the first weeks of him joining. Ian, who has extensive experience in the military charity sector, was able to see the camaraderie that underscores the Association’s ethos.

“I loved the positivity of the weekend and it was a fantastic privilege to meet Members and their partners,” he said. “There was a real celebratory atmosphere, with Members connecting, enjoying the weekend and building bonds that will last into the future. It was a great opener for me, and I’m now travelling around the country meeting staff and Members to learn more about what makes Blesma tick. The great thing about the Association is that it is Member-led, and I see my role as helping deliver what the Members want.”

### REWARDING WORK

Ian, 40, started his working life in IT but soon realised he wanted a profession that gave back to communities. That led him to the charity sector where he forged a career at an engineering benevolent fund. He then spent almost a decade at the RAF Benevolent Fund, where he rose to the pivotal role of Head of Individual Grants and Advice prior to joining Blesma.

“Working for a military charity is incredibly rewarding because you work



Director Independence and Wellbeing Ian Johnson gets stuck in at Members’ Weekend

with people who have given a lot for their country, and to be able to do something for them and make a difference to someone’s life is satisfying,” said Ian, who is married and has sons aged eight and nine. “No matter how challenging a day I have, the opportunity to help make a difference is a huge driving force.

“Blesma has an excellent reputation in the sector, and when the post came up it

sounded like a combination of everything I had been doing, such as running welfare teams. There’s a lot of talk in the sector about using lived experience models, but Blesma has been driven by those for 90 years. It has always been Member-led and I regard my role as a facilitator in that process with a team that is dedicated to supporting Members.”

Blesma has announced a new five-year

strategy (see p04 for more) which will focus on getting the best for Members and keeping the Association healthy in the face of continuing financial pressures.

“The strategy will enable us to thrive, and there will be real growth in activities and wellbeing support, which will be my focus,” added Ian. “It is always difficult to marry up what everyone wants and then work out how to deliver that, but Blesma will continue to do what it does best; providing individual support through BSOs, Outreach Officers and activities.

“I will be using my background and connections across the military sector and other occupational funds to support Members and provide advocacy across different aspects of their lives. I hope my experience will allow us to continue to punch above our weight in terms of funding.”

#### TARGETED SUPPORT

The impact of a new government in Westminster is still developing, with the Veterans’ Affairs post moving from the Cabinet to the Ministry of Defence, while new budgets are yet to be set.

“We will be monitoring government policy but we are very involved through COBSEO (the Confederation of Service Charities) and are confident that Blesma has a strong voice for its Members if any changes are put forward,” added Ian. “We have great connections across the military charity sector and into government, and we will be at the centre of any discussions around the welfare of our Members.”

Ian, who is a scout leader in his spare time, is relishing his new role. “Blesma has an excellent reputation that has been hard-earned and I’ve already seen that it is well-deserved,” he said. “I’ve been amazed by the breadth of things happening in-house, particularly the range of activities that the team manages to put on.

“It will be my focus to ensure that the support we offer is really targeted to what Members need, and that we are doing it with a balanced budget so we’re able to do it for the entire life of every Member.”

*If you would like to get in contact with Ian you can email him on [diw@blesma.org](mailto:diw@blesma.org) or call him on 07881 308794*

Hari Budha Magar on the summit of Mount Denali, the highest mountain in North America



## Four down, three to go for record-breaking climber

**M**ountaineer Hari Budha Magar has conquered another of the world’s tallest peaks in his campaign to scale the planet’s ‘Seven Summits’. The former Gurkha corporal, who became the first double above-knee amputee to summit Mount Everest in 2023, scaled Alaska’s Mount Denali – the highest mountain in North America – in July.

The 45 year old, who was injured in an IED explosion in 2010 whilst serving in Afghanistan, now needs to tackle the tallest mountains in South America, Antarctica and Indonesia to have reached the highest peaks on each continent.

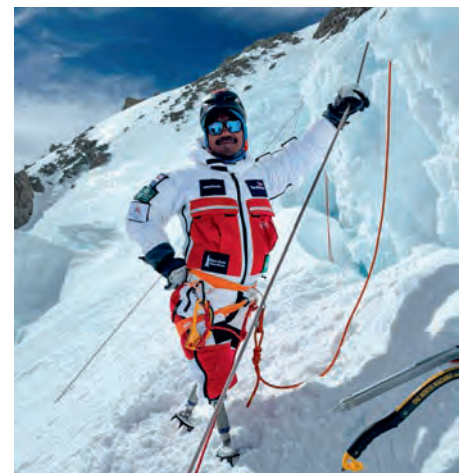
“It was a tough climb, and the conditions on the final two days when we were going for the summit were very windy and cold,” said Hari. “Denali threw up different challenges from Everest, but we were the only team to summit in that week which shows how difficult it was.”

The entire ascent took two weeks, with Hari’s team having to carry every piece of equipment with them as strict regulations forbid climbers to set up staging camps on the mountain.

“Some of the guys had to pull sleds with up to 90kg of gear, and we all had lots of

equipment with us,” added Hari. “The aim of the climb was to show what is possible and how people can adapt. I will continue to climb to inspire the disabled community and help change perceptions.”

Hari, who was part-funded by Blesma for his Everest mission, is now focusing on securing enough support to attempt Mt Aconcagua in Argentina, Puncak Jaya in Papua New Guinea and Mount Vinson in Antarctica to add to his tally of Mont Blanc, Kilimanjaro, Everest and Denali.



Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Andy Bate, Hari Budha Magar



Words: Nigel Smith

## It's full steam ahead for great sailing partnership

**A**fter a hiatus, Blesma and the Gwennili Sailing Trust are working together again to provide sailing opportunities for Members. In May, five Members were invited to Hamble Point Marina to spend five days sailing the Solent on board the 46ft sailing boat *Reunion* in the company of three other boats on the Trust's sponsored summer cruise.

The first day included boat handling duties, man overboard drills and helming practice. Day two saw the crew make their way to Yarmouth, while the following day

the destination was Gunwharf Quays in Portsmouth. With the wind and tide in our favour we were able to sail around the south side of the island.

After a night in Gunwharf Quays we made our way out of Portsmouth Harbour and sailed the Eastern Solent, anchoring in Osborne Bay for lunch before all the boats moored up in the Cowes Yacht Haven that night.

On the Friday morning all the boats made their way back to base in the Hamble with spirits high and new friendships forged.

## ULTRA RUN IS THE ULTIMATE 'THANK YOU'

MEMBER GAVIN OSBORNE GROUND out the miles to raise £1,235 for the Association. The former RLC soldier covered 73km through trails, fells, meadows and riverbanks in the Peak District Ultra Challenge in 11 hours 1 minute in July.

"It was a hard physical and mental challenge and, due to having only one eye, I struggled with depth perception, making it hard to navigate through rocks and boulders," he said. "After 50km, the most

I had run before, the challenge became mental. My head and body were telling me it was too hard, but I just keep battling on.

"I raised money for Blesma because, since I became a Member in October 2023, the charity has helped with so many positive changes in my life; finances, support, advice, activities, meeting other people who have the same injuries and just making me feel understood. I will always be grateful to them and the staff."

## NEWCOMERS MORE THAN WELCOME AT BLESMA FISHING DAY

THE BLESMA FISHING DAY, RUN BY Member and former Guardsman Dave Watson and held in stunning Staffordshire countryside, is a highlight of the Association's angling calendar. This year's event was a big success and next year's event is already inked into the calendar!

Members assembled at the Cudmore Fisheries, one of the UK's top angling venues, for a weekend of fishing and guidance from local experts in June. Friday was practice day ahead of the Dave Lewan Memorial Fishing Match, which was held on the Saturday.

"It was a fantastic weekend in a beautiful setting," said angler Keith Meakin, who was a Blesma Welfare Officer for 16 years.



"Everyone from Cudmore Fisheries looked after us and made us feel so welcome, and we were supplied with endless cups of tea and cake to keep us going.

"I took up fishing after being diagnosed with PTSD, and I find it so relaxing. You've also got the camaraderie and the banter, so it's a real tonic."

New anglers are always welcome and kit can be provided for first-timers or people returning to angling.

"It's such a great boost and I would recommend Members give it a try and definitely attend the annual fishing day, which will be in June next year," said Keith.

*For further details, please contact Keith at [treasurer.nottingham@blesma.org](mailto:treasurer.nottingham@blesma.org)*



# Martial arts enthusiasts out in force for Blesma

**B**razilian Jiu Jitsu fighter Ricky Bellingham's star quality helped raise almost £1,000 for Blesma from a masterclass to more than 60 martial arts enthusiasts.

The event, attended by soldiers, veterans and civilians, was held at the Xion Gym in Andover to boost awareness of the sport and to raise funds for the Association.

"Brazilian Jiu Jitsu has become really big in the Forces and Ricky is a serving soldier who has elite athlete status, so he was a big draw," said Steve Humphrey, an RMP

Warrant Officer, who organised the event with gym owner Chris Duncan-Smith.

"We wanted to do something for Blesma and, because of the military nature of the audience, there was a lot of awareness and appreciation of the work the Association does.

"Ricky travelled from Plymouth for the event to help boost the sport's profile and help Blesma, which was very good of him. We are delighted to have raised some money for the charity because of its strong link with the military."

## TIME TO GET INTO THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

THE 2024 BLESMA CHRISTMAS Carol Concert will be held at Chelmsford Cathedral on Thursday 12 December. The service will start at 7.30pm and will include readings and carols as well as performances by soprano singer Naomi Kilby and The Sound Collective choir. Following the service, there will be an opportunity to mingle with staff, Members and supporters whilst you enjoy mulled wine and mince pies.

*The tickets are free but the spaces are limited. Book your place now at [www.blesma.org/carolservice](http://www.blesma.org/carolservice)*



## News in brief

### KIRK'S PRESENTATION ABOVE PAR AT GOLF DAY

Member Kirk Bowett was the star attraction at a Blesma Golf Day held at the South Kyme course near Coningsby, Lincolnshire, on 28 July. The former Mercian Regiment corporal, now a Ministry of Defence survival instructor and actor, gave a presentation about Blesma to participants at the event, which raised £801.

### CASTLE COLLECTION IS A BIG SUCCESS

A collection at Drummond Castle Gardens in Crieff, Perthshire, attended by Outreach Officer Rachael Kennedy raised £119 on 02 August. Blesma has been invited back for another date in September.



### BRIAN LAYS WREATH TO REMEMBER THE SOMME

The annual commemoration of the Battle of the Somme was held at the Irish National War Memorial in Dublin on Saturday 13 July. Member Brian McKee (above) and Blesma volunteer David Turpie travelled from Northern Ireland to attend and commemorate all those who lost their lives during the battle or in either World War.

"I had the privilege of laying a wreath on behalf of Blesma. On hand to help me as I could not get the wheelchair up some steps was my best friend and Blesma volunteer David Turpie," said Brian.



# Coming to a TV near you!

THE ASSOCIATION'S FIRST-EVER TV ADVERT HAS HIT THE NATION'S SCREENS FOR A SIX-MONTH FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN. THE AIM IS TO SPREAD THE WORD OF BLESMA, WHAT IT DOES AND WHO IT DOES IT FOR

**F**ormer Royal Marines Commando Mark Ormrod is used to being in the firing line, and his most recent mission was laced with high-octane action, even if it was of the 'Daddy Day Care' variety. The triple amputee found himself very much on the receiving end when he took the starring role in Blesma's TV advertising campaign that went live in August.

The 30-second commercial, which is being shown across numerous channels, is the focal point of a

six-month campaign that aims to boost fundraising, legacy giving and awareness as the Association continues to innovate to support its Members.

The advert, which was devised and produced by renowned advertising agency TBWA\MCR, features Mark enduring the trials and tribulations of nappy changing. The humorous advert illuminates one of the everyday challenges that are faced by injured veterans, and highlights the fact that Members are human beings as well as having heroic pasts.



**Lights, camera, act-oh!: Mark gets a soaking during the filming of Blesma's first-ever television advert**

Mark, who was seriously injured in Afghanistan in 2007, has three children of his own and the filming brought back all sorts of memories for him of grappling with the basics of fatherhood with a disability.

“Changing nappies is hard enough when you have all your limbs!” Mark says. “The advert is light-hearted, but it has a powerful underlying message because it shows that life goes on after an injury and that Blesma is there for injured veterans for life.”

**A LIGHT-HEARTED APPROACH**

Months of research and planning were funnelled into a crammed day of filming in a house in Cheshire where Mark had the task of changing a nappy from multiple angles and reliving the experience of a gurgling baby peeing with unerring accuracy at the wrong moment. (The stream fortunately came from an out-of-shot crew member firing a ready supply of soft drink from a ketchup bottle!)

“Charity adverts can be quite sombre, but we wanted something different – a light-hearted approach,” says Board of Trustees member Liam Maguire, Executive Director at Good Relations, a leading creative PR and content agency. “When we looked at insights into why people leave legacies, the resounding response was that they want to do something positive. They want to help people, and that should be celebrated and is something to be joyful about.”

The Board of Trustees debated long and hard over committing budget to creating the first TV advert

ever commissioned by Blesma but decided to go ahead as research showed that other military charities are reaping fundraising rewards from media campaigns.

“The decision was certainly not taken lightly, but it was taken in the best interests of the Members,” adds Liam. “We started talking about this project two years ago and have carried out a lot of research and done a lot of robust debating before going ahead.”

“Billions and billions of pounds are spent on advertising by brands and charities because it works. Other charities in the sector are seeing benefits from TV advertising. We have a responsibility as a Board of Trustees to spend the Association’s money wisely and to continue to innovate and look for new ways to fundraise and generate income so we can continue to deliver much needed support to our Members.”

**SPREADING THE BLESMA WORD**

The advert is aimed at people who are considering leaving a legacy, but it will also boost general fundraising potential and bring Blesma’s name to a much wider audience. The advert’s reach and impact will be monitored over the six-month campaign.

“We believe it will resonate with the public in a good way,” adds Liam. “Anyone who has changed a nappy, especially for a baby boy, will know that the minute you take that nappy off, you’re getting sprayed. It is a difficult enough job with two working limbs, so to have to do it while standing on prosthetic legs or with any injury just increases the challenge.”





## MAKING HIS MARK

*Mark Ormrod thought his nappy-changing days were behind him, but the father of three was back in action for an intensive day of filming for the Association*

“I’ve done loads of things since my injury, but being in a TV advert is a first,” says Mark, from Plymouth. “I really enjoyed the whole process and it will be great for Blesma.”

Mark is no stranger to action. Since his injuries, he has become an Invictus Games medal winner, a motivational speaker, a husband and father, and an ambassador for injured veterans and for Blesma.

“Hopefully, lots of people who may know little or nothing about Blesma will see the advert and understand what it does,” he says. “Most people can’t relate to being an amputee, but they can relate to being a parent and the struggles of changing a nappy.”

“The advert will reach a whole new demographic of people who will see that Blesma makes a lifetime commitment to its Members. The aim is to increase the number of people who leave legacies, but it will also boost general fundraising and spread the word.”

“The advert shows a human side with a message that veterans have lives to get on with, families to raise and careers to pursue after injury – and that Blesma supports them through all of that.”

“For me, it was important to do this, to give back so Blesma can continue to do what it does best.”





**“We wanted to show veterans in real-life situations that were relatable to people who hadn’t served”**

“We wanted the campaign to show veterans in real-life situations that were relatable to people who had not served. We have a tendency to celebrate our Armed Forces community as heroes, which they are, but they are also normal people facing the reality of everyday challenges.”

Lauren Dawson, a senior account manager at advertising agency TBWA\MCR who were responsible for the advert, agrees: “We certainly all felt an instant connection to the charity and this strengthened the more time we spent with them,” she says. “The evidence we saw of the work Blesma does really was a driver for us to do whatever we could to ensure it can carry on getting the support needed to continue with the amazing work it does.”

“The Blesma team were amazing to work with; like-minded people who were up for doing whatever it took to produce the best possible work. They wanted something disruptive, and we really admired their bravery to create this advert and appreciated their trust in us. It’s been so enjoyable working with them. Mark was fantastic, too – he brought energy and humour and was a complete pro on the shoot.”

“We’re very proud of the advert. It reflects the humour of veterans and, most importantly, it showcases Blesma and the work it does.”

*If you haven’t seen the advert on TV yet, you can watch it at [www.blesma.org/legacy](http://www.blesma.org/legacy)*

## Leaving a gift in a Will

**Gifts in Wills are a hugely important part of Blesma’s operational capability – one in five Members are helped as a direct result of someone leaving the Association a gift in their Will.**

“We are here for our Members and their families for as long as they need our support, and legacies form an important part of what we can provide,” says Anna Scalera, Blesma’s Head of Fundraising. “There is plenty of information and help available for anyone considering making a gift in their Will and it does have such a positive impact – we appreciate everyone who chooses to do that for us as it is a wonderful act of generosity.”

Blesma partners with two free Will writing services – the National Free Wills Network and Octopus Legacy – to make it very easy to set up or get advice on leaving a gift in your Will. There are three ways to support Blesma by leaving a legacy gift. Pecuniary Gifts are donations of a specific sum of money, while Residuary Gifts are a percentage of your estate given after any pecuniary gifts have been made and any debts and taxes paid. Finally, Specific Gifts are donations of specific items or assets such as property, jewellery, stocks or shares.

***For more advice on leaving a gift in your Will, please visit [www.blesma.org/legacy](http://www.blesma.org/legacy) or call Blesma on 020 8548 7085***



**Your guide to gifts in Wills**

Leave a lasting legacy to Blesma and you will support limbless and injured Service men and women for life



# NEED TO KNOW...

# THE VETERANS' MOBILITY FUND



**T**he Veterans' Mobility Fund (VMF) is in full swing, with life-changing grants for as much as £80,000 being approved as part of its five-year remit to support veterans with specialist equipment not available on the NHS. The £2.52 million fund, which was established last year after advocacy and campaigning by Blesma and Help for Heroes, is being administered by both charities, with applications assessed by an expert panel.

It is designated to provide mobility aids such as specialist wheelchairs and mobility scooters, orthotics such as splints and braces, and other equipment to help veterans lead independent and fulfilling lives.

The service, which is funded by the Office for Veterans' Affairs via the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, went live on 12 March and requires applicants to make their claim with supporting documentation from a GP and/or an occupational therapist. That is then assessed by a panel that includes Blesma Support Officer (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier and other experts in veteran care, alongside a veteran with lived experience.

The panel meets once a month and its first job is to assess if the equipment is available on the NHS and, if it isn't,

to consider if it is the right equipment or if better alternatives are available before making a decision, which is then shared with the applicant in 30 days.

More than 40 grants have already been awarded, with an average funding of £6,000 to cover equipment as diverse as off-road wheelchairs to specialist orthotics.

"We know that sometimes veterans need assistance with their mobility that may not be fully met by NHS provision," says Brian. "This fund will enable us to support veterans, including Blesma Members, to access what they need to thrive – mobility should not be seen as a luxury."

Andrew Kochman, the Veterans' Mobility Fund Project Manager with Help for Heroes, adds: "The grants are for specialist equipment, but it is more than that. We want to help veterans be active in the community and do things that they wouldn't be able to do without the VMF.

The grants are there to help improve mental and physical health by allowing people to reconnect with their families, take care of their children, pursue work or take part in activities they are missing or cannot do because of mobility issues."

The key element of any application is the supporting documentation that outlines the need and helps the panel

make a detailed assessment. "The process has been designed to be easy to follow and accessible and, although it is still early days, it seems to be running smoothly," says Andrew. "The one area that might cause delays is getting appointments with doctors or occupational therapists to get an assessment and the supporting documentation. It may take time, but it is a necessary step that allows the grant awarding to function efficiently.

"If you are considering applying to the Veterans' Mobility Fund then our advice is to do just that because even if we cannot fund your application, we will provide you with the resources and signposts to other organisations that may be able to assist."

## YOUR 10-POINT GUIDE TO THE VETERANS' MOBILITY FUND

### **I** Who can apply?

Any veteran in receipt of a War Pension or an award from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme can apply for equipment that is linked to a service-attributable condition that affects their mobility. Those applying for a war pension or appropriate Armed Forces Compensation can also apply.



The VMF is for orthotics or specialist equipment that is not provided by the NHS

Words: Danny Buckland

## 2 What type of equipment can I apply for?

The application must be for something that is not usually provided by the NHS. This can be for orthotics or equipment that will help with daily, family or work life. Applications for vehicle adaptations will also be considered.

## 3 What is not included?

Car leases, monthly payments on cars, car loans, home adaptations, medical or surgical procedures, ongoing clinical treatment, hot tubs/saunas/hydro pools, or structural house adaptations will not be considered. Equipment that has already been purchased is not covered by the fund.

## 4 How long will I have to wait?

The application will be acknowledged within 10 working days from the time it is received and a decision will usually be made within 30 days. The panel does have the flexibility to accelerate the process in urgent cases. The time it takes to receive the equipment will depend on whether it is in stock with suppliers or if it is a bespoke item that will need to be manufactured to order. The panel works closely with specialist suppliers but cannot control their work or delivery schedules.

## 5 What documentation is needed?

Each application must be accompanied by supporting documentation from a GP and/or an occupational therapist or physiotherapist. Most professionals are aware of the paperwork needed and can provide it quickly after they have made their assessment.

## 6 Who makes the decision?

A panel of expert with a wealth of experience of working with, and caring for, veterans. The panel meets monthly and includes a Blesma Member to give an opinion based on lived experience and peer perspective, which are central to the fund's purpose and principles.

The panel will provide reasons behind any application refusal. These decisions could range from the equipment being available on the NHS, the need not having been clear or proven, or that alternatives would be better. A refusal would come with advice on how best to proceed with gaining support and funding from other sources.

## 7 What is the panel looking for?

A strong application will show a demonstrable need and benefit to the veteran. The panel also likes to see that

the veteran has been assessed by a clinician, that there is medical evidence that the mobility device is needed, that the veteran will be safe on the device, and that other mobility options have been considered and ruled out.

## 8 Can I appeal or reapply if my application is refused?

Yes, providing there is new documentation and evidence to show a service-attributable mobility condition.

## 9 How many times can I apply?

The panel reviews each case on an individual basis, so you can apply to the Veterans' Mobility Fund as many times as you want for mobility-related injuries. If you have complex health needs then it is possible to make applications for each. Similarly, if the clinical need changes then a new application can be made.

## 10 How and where do I apply?

The application process can be accessed via the following link – <https://r1.dotdigital-pages.com/p/1DW2-1CB3/vmfapplication1>. If you are unable to access the online form, please contact the Veterans' Mobility Fund on 0300 303 9888.

# TIME TO GET OUTSIDE AND ENJOY THE RIDE

CYCLING HAS ALWAYS BEEN INCREDIBLY POPULAR WITH MEMBERS BECAUSE OF THE CHANCE TO GET OUTDOORS AND CHALLENGE YOURSELF IN THE COMPANY OF LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE. WHO ELSE FANCIES A BIT OF THIS?

**T**he effort from pedalling the long and winding roads eased into the background as Blesma cyclists enjoyed the pub meal to celebrate their achievements. The humour and banter soon overcame tired, aching muscles during the 'mini adventure' in North Wales that saw eight riders set off on four days of cycling through stunning scenery.

The trip, organised by Blesma Member and keen cyclist Mitch Singleton, gave the team a unique opportunity to ride together and take in the sights along hand-picked routes around the region. With backdrops of outstanding natural beauty including Anglesey and Puffin Island, the Great Orme above Llandudno, and Penrhyn and Caernarfon Castles, the week was an assault on the senses as well as the muscles.

"I thoroughly enjoyed it and it was a great way to meet up with Blesma friends and get to know new ones," says Martin Kettrick, who attended with his wife, Christine. "The rides were of varying lengths – between 15 and 30 miles – across good terrain and roads.



The stunning scenery of North Wales played host to Blesma's most recent cycling adventure



Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Andy Bate



“We had some fair climbs, which were challenging, but that was good because it brought out the team spirit with everyone helping and encouraging each other. Teamwork is a major part of what these rides are all about, and it was great to be a part of that.

“We had a fantastic support team; an ex-Royal Marine and a couple of former policemen, who were really good lads and gave up their free time to help – they couldn’t do enough for us,” adds Martin, 67, from Staffordshire, who was severely injured in a climbing accident while in the Royal Marines. “I am a paraplegic and use a special hand-bike, and the rides were good for me so I would recommend it to others. My bike, which is electric, has

been a lifeline for me. I can still get out, go cycling and enjoy the ride. I still have to pedal and work hard, but as I get older the electric bike helps and means I can still do things like this rather than miss out.

“It has certainly prolonged my cycling life and has meant I could be with the group and enjoy a really rewarding time out in the fresh air.”

### THREE EPIC ROUTES

The team assembled on a Sunday at the Disabled Riding Centre in Llanfynydd, Flintshire, North Wales; a purpose-built horse riding centre for those with a disability, which was to be their base for the week. The first day took them from Hoylake to Chester along the Wirral Way

onto the Millennium Greenway, whilst the second day featured the breathtaking Ystwyth Trail between Tregaron and Aberystwyth. With a rest day built into the programme, the final cycling day followed the North Wales Coastal Route from Llanfairfechan to Caernarfon Castle.

The team enjoyed incredible hospitality and evening meals at both the Dinorben Arms in Bodfari and the Cross Keys at Llanfynydd after their endeavours, but a highlight was fish and chips on the seafront at Aberystwyth after a long, hard day of cycling along the Ystwyth Trail in Mid Wales.

“It was a tough week to organise, with a lot of logistic glitches, but we got there and had a good time,” says Mitch Singleton, a former Royal Marines Commando. “It was billed as a mini adventure and a chance to get away, and the riders certainly had the chance to go to new places and enjoy the stunning Welsh countryside. There were some spectacular views and places of interest along the routes.

**“YOU ARE CYCLING WITH A GROUP OF LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE, ALL WORKING TO THE SAME END AND HELPING EACH OTHER ALONG THE WAY”**





The week catered for Members with a range of injuries

“The great thing about it was that it brought people together. David Grant, at 32, was the youngest Member there with Craig Howorth the next ‘young man’ at 58, whilst our oldest cyclist was 67. It was great to watch these ‘old guys’, myself included, turn into young men again. Listening to the banter and chirping between the group

was like we were 16 again and just joining the services on our first adventure.

“When you join any military service, you become part of a group. That gives you many obstacles throughout your career, but most importantly it also brings many moments to treasure. Alongside this are the benefits to your physical and mental

health. Here, you are cycling with a group of like-minded people, all working towards the same end, completing the route and helping each other along the way.”

### SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Mitch, who lives in North Wales, is considering other cycling events for 2025 that offer opportunities to all types of riders, from beginners to those who are more experienced, as well as trips that might focus on sit-up bikes, hand-cycles or recumbents, or accommodate wheelchairs.

“There was some learning from this trip for me as an organiser which we can get right for future events, and I strongly believe they will provide a great experience for Blesma Members,” he adds. “We can change routes and venues, tweak things and arrange events in different locations throughout the country.

“It is a fantastic opportunity to meet and mix with friends new and old who have similar backgrounds and experiences. It is a real chance to get out and be in the countryside with some fantastic views,

## FANCY GETTING INVOLVED IN A BLESMA ACTIVITY?

**F**rom glamping in Somerset to skiing in Colorado, cycling in New York to fitness in Spain, with lots of other activities in between, Blesma gives Members the chance to experience all kinds of events every year – and they’re all free!

In 2025, there will be plenty of events in the activities calendar for every taste, level and ability – from beginner to serious adventurer. There’ll be something on offer for every age group and all interests too, so if you think activities are just for adrenaline junkies, think again.

There are lots of easily accessible events close to home, and if you fancy seeing foreign shores next year Blesma will be jetting off across the globe. But the most important part of any activity is still the social aspect – Members help each other, work together and share experiences – you don’t have to be an expert to have fun!

**Sign up to the Activities email newsletter to stay up to date with all the events. Email [eventsca@blesma.org](mailto:eventsca@blesma.org) and ask to be added to the subscription list**



Bottom: having a breather and taking in the glorious views

fully supported by a great team at HQ and the volunteers, who are so important. We couldn't have put this event on without volunteers like Russ Humphreys. They are a special part of Blesma and really put themselves out to make sure Members get the best from any activity."

**GIVING UP THEIR TIME**

Volunteers like former Royal Marine and firefighter Russ Humphreys played an integral role on the North Wales bike ride.

"It was a great week despite one or two teething problems and the odd logistical challenge," says the 65 year old from Shrewsbury, who is a Blesma volunteer in the North West and regularly helps out with a number of activities.



"Mitch asked if I would like to help out and I jumped at the chance. I've been volunteering full time for Blesma for about three years and help out with activities such as archery, clay pigeon shooting and zip wire.

"During the week it was my role to load the bikes every morning and transport them to the daily start points, all prepped and ready to go for the Members to start their day. I'd meet them along the route for refreshment stops before loading up at the end of the ride and driving the bikes back to the accommodation.

"There is so much organisation that goes on behind the scenes to put on an event like this, and Mitch did a great job. I think we've all learned a lot from it, and that experience will help make future events even better.

"The riders had a good week, and many of them are looking forward to future events. Hopefully, experiences like this should attract other Members. There is definitely a lot of enthusiasm for more cycling events around the country."

**"I STILL HAVE TO WORK HARD, BUT AS I GET OLDER THE ELECTRIC BIKE MEANS I CAN STILL DO THINGS LIKE THIS RATHER THAN MISS OUT"**

# Bake for Blesma



Host your own Bake for Blesma event with friends, family, or colleagues. Fundraise for injured veterans by selling your creations or asking for a small fee to attend.

Registration:

**£7.50**

Registration includes:

- Members recipes
- poster print out
- cake flags
- balloons



**1st September - 31st October**

Raise £100 and receive your Star Baker prize – a fantastic Blesma mug and tea towel.

**Contact Us**

fundraising@blesma.org or 020 8548 7089

To register go to

**[blesma.org/bakeforblesma](https://blesma.org/bakeforblesma)**

**Blesma**  
THE LIMBLESS VETERANS





Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Andy Bate

# Members' Weekend 2024

## Forest Pines Hotel and Spa, Brigg

Members' Weekend is one of the key events in the Association's calendar. This year didn't disappoint as Members came from across the UK for a weekend of fun, laughs and camaraderie

**F**rom Motown to mosaics, this year's Members' Weekend delivered activities and fun for some 175 Members, their partners and guests. Whether you fancied a round of golf on a pristine course, preferred to have a go at cake decorating or decided to get your blood pumping with an exhilarating boxing class, there was something for everyone over the action-packed weekend.

The event was held at a new venue, the Forest Pines Hotel and Spa, near Scunthorpe, but the camaraderie and banter were vintage Blesma, with friendships renewed and new ones made over the weekend. Almost 40 per cent of the guests were first-timers who relished the opportunity to get stuck into Blesma and learn how fellow Members could support them.

"It was a fantastic event and exemplified what Blesma is all about; that sense of family and community feeling of togetherness," said Chief Executive Vivienne Buck, who was experiencing her first Members' Weekend. "The sense of enjoyment and fun was everywhere. The team did a great job to make sure everything was organised, and to finish on Sunday evening with everyone singing *Sweet Caroline* with Chelsea Pensioner Colin Thackery was a fitting end to an incredible weekend."

### AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY OF MEMBERS

As usual, the gala dinner took centre stage on the first evening, and provided the perfect place to present the Blesma Awards (see p50). A dignified Remembrance Service took place the following morning, led by The



**Maurillia Simpson was hooked after trying the boxing classes**

Reverend Jim Caldwell, a British Army chaplain based at Catterick, and drew a strong congregation. This was followed by the AGM, which covered important business and saw General Sir Adrian Bradshaw step down as Blesma Chairman after six years in the role. His replacement, Ed Davis, was voted in at the AGM (see po8 for a detailed interview with both Chairmen), whilst Sir Adrian reaffirmed the Association's strategic intent to assist Members to live independent and fulfilling lives, emphasising that the support is for life.

"As we look ahead to the remainder of 2024, we are confident that we have a clear vision and dedicated team to continue to deliver our mission. And we're optimistic that we have a supportive and engaged community of Members who are the heart and soul of our Association," said Sir Adrian.



Steve Gill takes aim on one of the selection of lawn games on offer



“Together, we can overcome any challenge to achieve any goal.”

Colin Rouse, who has served on the Board of Trustees for 16 years, has also stepped down and General Adrian paid tribute to his unstinting dedication and support to the Association and its Members. “Colin has been an absolute stalwart member of the Board, and I have personally valued his support, advice, comradeship and friendship,” he told the audience. “The effort that he put into his work on the Board is deserving of special recognition. Thank you.”

### **SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE**

With Association business concluded, Members were able to enjoy a buffet lunch before they waded into an array of activities across the Forest Pines complex.

Blesma Support Officer Kevin Long led the first Colin Wilson Memorial

**“THERE ARE SO MANY THINGS TO DO HERE, AND IT IS GOOD TO CATCH UP WITH OLD FRIENDS. BLESMA IS LIKE BEING IN A BIG FAMILY”**



Golf Day in memory of the former Royal Green Jacket and Blesma Member who was an avid golfer. Elsewhere, there was an opportunity to let off steam with boxing training sessions run by The Fighting Chance charity.

“It was great fun and great exercise,” said Ajit Tamang, who served in the Queen’s Gurkha Signals and attended Members’ Weekend with his wife, Sudha. “The weekend has been really enjoyable because there are so many things to do, and it is good to catch up with old friends and meet new ones. Being in Blesma is like being in a big family.”

The Fighting Chance’s director Imran Khalil is establishing a regular class in London, and Blesma Members will be welcome. “It went really well, and we’ve had some excellent feedback,” said Imran. “One Member even said that it was the best fun he’d had in years. It was



great to meet inspirational Members and staff, and our coaches really enjoyed putting on the sessions. We all came away from it on a high.”

On a more sedate note, Members were able to get involved in a range of crafting classes, with the sessions for mosaics, cake decorating and decorative knot-tying full throughout the day.

Caron King, who runs MayFly Mosaics, guided guests as they created their own mosaic poppies from ceramic tiles and glass beads. “It was my first time at a Blesma event and it was fantastic. The people are so nice and friendly, and they really enjoyed making their poppies,” she said.

“This is a creative pastime, but it is also very therapeutic because you have to concentrate on the design. That’s when people start to lose themselves and don’t think about anything else.

At the end, there’s a feelgood factor from creating something yourself.”

Blesma Member Martin Brummitt found himself centre stage in the knot-tying classes as he assisted course leader Phil Cook during the popular workshops.

“Martin was at some of the online classes I did for Blesma during lockdown, and it was good to have his help over the afternoon as a lot of people took part,” said Phil. “It was fun and educational for me as I got to learn about the work Blesma does and to meet some Members.”

Internationally renowned cake designer Lindy Smith continued the creative theme

with her sugar crafting lessons as she taught how to prepare fondant icing and decorative stencil work on biscuits.

With other crafting opportunities including perfume making, as well as lawn games and live music drifting across the gardens, the weekend headed towards its finale with a sweet smell of success.

Martin Turner, who served in the Coldstream Guards for 24 years, summed up the mood after attending his first Members’ Weekend. “It has been brilliant. You get to meet up with old friends and meet new people. Where else can you do that and have so much fun?” he said.

## How to get involved in 2025

*Some of the activities mentioned here, and many more besides, will be on offer throughout next year – all for free! For more on what’s coming up in 2025, and detailed instructions on how to apply, keep visiting [www.blesma.org/activities](http://www.blesma.org/activities)*





Martin suffered brain haemorrhages, strokes and limb loss in a three-month period in 2020 after leaving the Army. “My Support and Outreach Officers both told me that I should give Members’ Weekend a go. I was a bit reticent to try it, but I’m glad I did apply now. I can’t fault it!”

Blesma’s Chief Executive Vivienne Buck was delighted with how the event went. “Everyone I spoke with wants to come back next year,” she said. “We strive to connect with Members and their wider families, and this is one of the many ways in which we do that. Being there to help each other is Blesma’s star quality, and that shone across the weekend.”

“Jess and the Activities Team do an amazing job to organise this weekend. We have busy, challenging times ahead, but the spirit of Blesma is very strong and our Members, and their families, continue to inspire us to work on their behalf.”

**Above left:  
Members prepare  
to tee off for the  
inaugural Colin  
Wilson Memorial  
Golf Day**



## My Members’ Weekend

### Dean Mills

*Dean, a former RAF Senior Aircraftman, who has organised events and fundraising for the Association, was one of many Members attending for the first time. The 53 year old, from West Yorkshire, is a Blesma volunteer Welfare Officer and attended the event with his 20-year-old son, Nathaniel*

#### How was the weekend?

I had a fantastic time – everyone was so welcoming and friendly. My son Nathaniel came and was really made to feel a part of it – he was overwhelmed that everyone was so friendly.

#### What were your highlights?

Meeting other Members for the first time and being able to share knowledge and experiences. I am only nine weeks post amputation and have been able to speak to Members who are 20 years on. To get their take on everything was so valuable.

#### What activities did you do?

The boxing was a great idea and worked really well. The coaches were great, and it didn’t matter about your physical capabilities as everyone got something from it.

#### What was your overall impression of the weekend?

Everyone just had a great time – to have that opportunity to get out and meet people with shared experiences is very special. It makes such a difference to speak to people who have been through what you are experiencing and to know that things will improve.



## Gala Dinner

*Members' Weekend wouldn't quite be the same without the chance to get dressed up at the gala dinner*

*Meeting fellow Members and their partners over dinner has always been one of the highlights of the weekend. We did our fair share of mingling, but if we didn't get around to saying hi, you can still have your say. Let us know what you thought by dropping us a line at [editor@blesma.org](mailto:editor@blesma.org)*





# Report on the 2024 Blesma AGM

## ITEM 1: FORMAL OPENING

The National Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming and thanking all the Members and staff who were attending, as well as the Members who had submitted proxy voting forms. The Chief Executive said that it was the first AGM that had facilitated e-voting, but only one Member had chosen to attend the meeting by Teams. Proxy votes had been submitted and votes at the meeting would be counted. There were no issues raised over the record of proceedings for the 2023 AGM published in the Autumn 2023 issue of *Blesma Magazine*.

## ITEM 2: CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman started by stating the strategic intent of the Board over the next five years. The Board resolves to have Blesma continue to be the principal Association for the Service disabled of limb. Blesma's defining purpose is to assist its Members to live independent and fulfilling lives. Blesma will be distinguished by a fellowship of shared experience. It will exploit knowledge of the experience. It will inspire. It will be about the celebration and realisation of potential. At the same time, it will bring comfort. Blesma will be there for life.

In the recent past, the cost-of-living crisis coupled with signs of economic recession created an extremely difficult fundraising environment for charities as donors faced rising bills and falling real incomes, which constrained their ability to give at prior levels. Blesma has been operating at a deficit since 2020, so it will need to deliver against a clear set of priorities, based on need, to address the significant impact of poor economic growth and a difficult fundraising environment. It must hold a level

of reserves that not only covers short-term operating costs to ensure business continuity, but also allows for increased costs of comprehensive and complex support to Members, increased costs for supporting the most infirm later in life, and instant access to funds for the support of casualties in a future conflict.

### **Blesma needs to be in a financial position that guarantees support to Members for life.**

In 2022, Blesma conducted a Members' Survey. The Board listened and has made small adjustments to deliver on the top two priorities: mobility support and physical health, followed by regional Outreach activities focused on social inclusion. Over the past year, the budget has increased in these areas but has had to be tweaked elsewhere to provide financial balance. This means slightly less of the more expensive and exotic activities, but overall expenditure on grants and welfare support has increased. It is a process of evolution to pull Blesma out of operating at a deficit.

### **The National Chairman then reviewed the 2023 Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statements as follows:**

2023 was a difficult year for many, with the global economic crisis and the escalating conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. These events had a significant impact on our Members, our fundraising and our reserves. However, despite these challenges, we remained steadfast in our commitment to provide life-long support to our Members. During the year, we welcomed 217 new Members into the Association but sadly lost 155 of our Members.

Blesma's four Lines of Operation, which




we use to categorise the activities are: Security, Identity, Connectivity and Resourcing.

### **SECURITY**

Security is the foundation of our support to our Members. It means ensuring that they have access to the best possible advice, assistance and welfare support, as well as the most suitable prosthetics, mobility aids and adaptations. It also means advocating for their rights and entitlements, and raising awareness of their needs and aspirations.

In 2023, our Blesma Support Officers, Outreach Officers and volunteers maintained close contact with our Members in the UK and overseas, with 14,170 contacts, of which 677 were home visits and 30 online consultations. We awarded 1,397 welfare grants to 1,141 Members, providing support across a range of needs. We also assisted with equipment and training for employment.



Blesma's Chairman  
Sir Adrian Bradshaw  
takes questions from the  
floor during the AGM

We continued to monitor and influence the provision of prosthetics to our Members across the UK, working closely with the NHS, the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre, the Veterans' Prosthetics Panel, which authorised 376 successful advanced prosthetic component applications for veterans valued at £2,111,591, and the Op RESTORE programme, which received 358 referrals into the service. We also represented our Members on various policy working groups and forums, such as the NHS England Prosthetic Service Review Board and the Direct Skeletal Fixation Policy Working Group.

We supported our Members with their benefit claims and appeals, working with the Department for Work and Pensions and its providers, as well as representing them at 10 hearings and tribunals in 2023. We also engaged with the devolved governments and administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

to ensure that our Members had access to the best possible support and services in their regions. Our Benefits and Social Care Adviser successfully resolve 63 benefit enquiries submitted via BSOs and a further 31 directly from Members.

#### **IDENTITY**

Identity is the essence of our support to our Members. It means enabling them to discover and develop their potential, to pursue their passions and interests, and to connect with others who share their experiences and values. It also means celebrating their achievements, recognising their contributions and honouring their sacrifices.

In 2023, we offered a varied programme of international and national activities for our Members, ranging from skiing in France and winter sports in Colorado, to golf in Portugal and sailing in Greece. Members also took part in cycling, family glamping, Widows and Seniors Weeks,

and other group activities across the UK. We also supported our Members in their own personal challenges, such as mountaineering, motorsports, diving, bodybuilding, endurance events and other competitive sports.

We delivered two innovative programmes funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust: the Afghanistan Veterans' Fund project, which focused on those injured in recent conflicts, and the Women's Veterans Fund programme, which aimed to empower and support female veterans.

We also launched a new Storytelling and Wellbeing Programme in June 2023, in partnership with The Drive Project, with a wide range of Members signing up. The programme included bringing Blesma Members who were injured in Afghanistan together with injured Ukrainian soldiers to share their experiences.

In addition to the Members' Weekend last year at the Chesford Grange Hotel – which included the Annual General Meeting, a Remembrance Service and a range of activities – we participated in the Remembrance Parade at The Cenotaph, where our Members proudly represented our Association. We also continued to support Members through the Venture Fund, which enabled them to accomplish some amazing feats, such as Hari Budha Magar's record-breaking ascent of Everest.

#### **CONNECTIVITY**

Connectivity is the key to ensuring our Members have access to the latest information, news and updates about our Association and our activities.

It also means raising our profile and reputation among the public, the media, the Government and other stakeholders. It is essential to build and maintain strong relationships with our donors, partners and supporters who make our work possible.

In 2023, we produced four issues of *Blesma Magazine*, which featured inspiring stories of our Members and updates about our Association. We

started upgrading our website, which reached its highest-ever level of traffic during the year. We also maintained a strong presence across social media, with particular growth on LinkedIn.

We secured press coverage for our Association, with Hari Budha Magar's successful Everest climb being featured on the BBC and other news outlets. We co-operated closely with Help for Heroes and the Office for Veterans' Affairs on the award of the Veterans' Mobility Fund, which was officially announced by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs Rt Hon Johnny Mercer MP in October 2023 and commenced with the first applications in March 2024. In the first four months, we have already received 336 applications and circa £100,000 has been committed in funding.

We coordinated the delivery of the Office for Veterans' Affairs Health Innovation Fund project on assistive technology, in partnership with Anglia Ruskin University, which ended in early 2024 and is due for publication later this summer.

### RESOURCING

In 2023, 77% of all income came from general fundraising in the form of donations and legacies; 18% came from the investment portfolio and investment property (rental income); and 5% from grants and miscellaneous sources. General fundraising income (excluding legacies) was up 12% compared to 2022, owing to good performance from trusts and foundations, the make a smile lottery and corporate fundraising.

Legacy fundraising recovered well from 2022, with a 70% increase in receipts. We anticipate that fundraising conditions will remain particularly challenging in 2023, and that 17p (2022:22p) in every pound of income raised in 2023 will be used to raise funds in 2024.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, 2023 was a year of challenges and opportunities, of



Colin Rouse stepped down as a Trustee after 16 years on the Board

achievements and learnings, of resilience and innovation. We are proud of what we have accomplished, but we are also aware of the areas where we can improve and grow. We are grateful for the support and trust of our Members, staff, volunteers, donors, partners and supporters who make our work possible and meaningful.

As we look ahead to the remainder of 2024, we are confident that we have a clear vision and a dedicated team to continue to deliver our mission. We are also optimistic that we have a supportive and engaged community of Members who are the heart and soul of our Association. Together, we can overcome any challenge, seize any opportunity and achieve any goal. Together, we are Blesma.

### ITEM 3: NATIONAL TREASURER'S REPORT

Miles Ambler summarised Blesma's 2023 financial results as follows:

### INTRODUCTION

**a. From an economic perspective, 2023 was a bit of an anti-climax, yet again with mixed indicators, such as:**

The UK's GDP is estimated to have increased by 0.1% in 2023, following growth of 4.3% in 2022. This is the weakest annual change in real GDP since the financial crisis in 2009, (excluding the year 2020 which was affected by the pandemic). The annual rate of inflation fell from a high of 11.1% in October 2022 to 4.6% in October 2023, before falling further to 4% in December 2023.

**b. All these economic factors impact the delivery of our charitable objectives to our Members. Things like high inflation and high interest rates make things more expensive and some donors may stop, restrict or reduce their donations to the charity sector as a whole due to their reduced disposable income.**



## TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2023

c. The Financial Review in the Report summarises the situation, addresses fundraising, investments and reserves. The Independent Auditor's Report from Crowe LLP gives their opinion of our accounts, where they once again gave us a clean audit for yet another successful year. The Report also contains the Financial Statements, including notes to the accounts.

## INCOME

d. Total income (including donations, legacies, grants and other income) amounted to **£5.3 million**, which is 36% above 2022's income of **£3.95m**, and included:

(i) £2.1m of Legacy Income – a significant increase of 70% on the previous year's £1.2m, largely due to the relaxation of the bottlenecks in the probate administration process

associated with the pandemic. We have also taken other initiatives to boost legacies income for the medium to long term such as TV advertising and employing a Legacies Manager.

(ii) £2.2m of Donations and Grants Income – an increase of 13% on the previous year which was just under £2m, largely due to the relatively favourable fundraising environment post the pandemic and the waning effects of the war in Ukraine on the global economy. But the environment is still challenging.

(iii) £1m of Gross Investment Income (includes income from the Headquarters property – the second floor at London Road) an increase of 41% on 2022's (£700,000) largely due to good performance from the investment portfolio managed by Cazenove – especially overseas equities.

(iv) £21,500 of Other Income – a very slight decrease on the previous year's £23,000.

e. Total Incoming Resources less the cost of generating funds amounted to **£4.2m**, an increase of 45% on the previous year's **£2.9m**, largely due to the increase in total income.

## EXPENDITURE

f. Expenditure on charitable activities was **£4.9m** representing a slight decrease of 7% over the previous year's **£5.3m**, and includes:

(i) £4.6m spent on Welfare delivery (Security and Identity) – a slight decrease of 7% over the previous year's £4.9m, largely because the Association didn't pay the special "cost-of-living grants" paid to Members in 2022.

(ii) £307,000 covering representational work – a slight decrease of 2% on the previous year's £312,000, largely due to a reduction in staffing costs.

## BALANCE SHEET

g. Total funds increased by 2% from **£38.6m** in 2022 to **£39.2** in 2023, mainly due to the gain on investment of **£1.3m** (2022: loss on investment of **£3.4m**) and a reduction in total expenditure as noted above. Total fixed assets broadly remained the same at **£35.9m** – there was a slight appreciation in the value of the investment portfolio by 0.6%. Total current assets were up by 15% (from **£3.4m** in 2022 to **£3.9m** in 2023) due to accruals. Creditors and provision for liabilities were up by 2% (from **£0.511m** in 2022 to **£0.523m** in 2023) largely due to accrued expenses at year-end; e.g. provision for care home expenses.

## FURTHER NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS

h. Membership/welfare costs were down by 5% (from **£3.9m** in 2022 to **£3.7m** in 2023) largely because we didn't have to pay the one-off hardship grants.

(i) Activities costs were down by 19% (from **£1.1m** in 2022 to **£900,000** in 2023) mainly due to a decrease in overseas activities.

j. Awareness and representation costs were virtually unchanged at **£300,000**.

k. Staff costs were up by 5% (from **£2.2m** in 2022 to **£2.3m** in 2023) largely due to accrued annual leave.

l. Fundraising costs were up by 7% (from **£900,000** in 2022 to **£1m** in 2023), mainly as a result of an increase in database and direct mailing costs.

m. Support costs were up by 10% (from **£800,000** in 2022 to **£900,000** in 2023) largely due to premises and governance costs.

n. The closing bank balance in 2023 was broadly the same as in 2022 at **£2.8m**.

## CONCLUSION AND LOOKING FORWARD

o. The financial performance in 2023 was far better than 2022: all the main income categories exceeded 2022, and we managed to lower costs. However, we still face challenging times ahead due to geopolitical tension, the lingering effects of the pandemic and, of course, another form of pandemic or crisis might be lurking in the shadows. The fundraising environment is expected to be helped by falling inflation (the UK has managed to finally hit the Bank of England's CPI target of 2%) but we're not yet out of the woods.

We are currently operating at a deficit, and although this is planned and not accidental, at some point we'll have to return to a surplus position in order for Blesma to be there for its Members for life.

## ITEM 4: RESOLUTIONS

The following Resolutions were voted on at the AGM:

- a. To receive the Report and Accounts for the year ended 31st December 2023. Carried.
- b. To appoint Crowe Clark Whitehill LLP as auditors of the Association to hold office until the conclusion of the next General Meeting at which the Accounts are laid before the Association. Carried.
- c. To announce the retirements of Trustees since the last AGM and re-elect the persons listed below as Trustees of the Association.
  - (i) Retirements:  
General Sir Adrian Bradshaw  
KCB OBE DL  
Mr Colin Rouse
  - (ii) Election of new Blesma Trustees:  
Mr Ed Davis, to be appointed as Chairman of the Board. Carried.  
Ms Lisa Johnston. Carried.
- d. The Chairman announced that a



Lisa Johnston was voted onto the Board as a Member Trustee

Widow(er)s Adviser, Mrs Lorraine Anderson, has been appointed by the Board to advise and raise Widow(er)s issues or requests to the Board.

## ITEM 5: BOARD UPDATE

The Chairman stated that the Board update was included in his Chairman's address.

## ITEM 6: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The following items were discussed:  
a. Bournemouth Branch asked if Members' Weekend could be deconflicted from Armed Forces Day because it is an opportunity to fundraise. Those from devolved nations said that Armed Forces Day falls on a different weekend for them. Bringing it forward would also clash with Father's Day. The Board and Executive agreed to look at it, but the venue has

been booked for 29/30 June 2025.

b. Members from Nottingham raised the concern of the lack of Blesma literature in their Limb Centre. Blesma staff will provide up-to-date literature to all Limb Centres.

c. Branches asked for some more merchandise and Blesma items to give away on stands, along with current leaflets. The staff will review and provide what is appropriate.

d. A Member asked for a link to the TV advert when it goes live so that they can share on social media. Members will be sent the link. There was also a suggestion of producing a documentary on Blesma. This will be reviewed by the Communications Team.



e. A concern was raised over a lack of transparency and feedback from Help for Heroes with the Veterans' Mobility Fund. BSO (Prosthetics) and a Member on the panel will ensure that this improves.

f. There was a concern that some overseas Members may not have been contacted in the last year. Blesma overseas staff member will follow up.

g. A Member disagrees with female veteran-only events. The Chief Executive explained that these events were not paid for by Blesma funds but came from restricted funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Trust. As this issue was discussed in detail at AGM 2022, the Chairman stopped the discussion and asked for Members to vote on whether to continue to provide female-only events. The vote was carried unanimously. Other details associated to female events, including timing of events, school holidays, childcare, etc, will be reviewed by the Head of Activities and Events.

h. A Member asked if Members could be sent birthday and Christmas cards with staff contact details inside. This was raised last year and it was decided that it was too resource intensive, both in cost and staff effort.

i. The Chairman explained that the new Widow(er)s Adviser would advise the Board formally once a year but has open access to refer issues to the Board through the Chief Executive or Mr Gilbert, the Trustees' point of contact for Widows, or any other Trustee at any time of the year. He also stated that any change to the status of Widow(er)s being able to vote would need a change to the Articles. The Trustees will discuss it at a Board meeting.

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The Chairman thanked Members for their active participation in the AGM.  
**Vivienne Buck**  
Chief Executive



## My Members' Weekend

### Jess March, Head of Activities

*Behind Members' Weekend is a dedicated team that works throughout the year to make the event run smoothly. Jess March, Head of Activities and Events, had just enough time to exhale after the success of this year's gathering before starting to work on Members' Weekend 2025*

#### How much organising does Members' Weekend take?

We virtually close the book on this year and then get going with the next because it takes almost 12 months to plan and arrange. There's a big team involved and everyone is dedicated to making it the best experience for the Members and their partners/guests.

#### What are the main challenges?

No matter what hotel we go to, there are only a limited number of adapted rooms, so placing people in the right rooms is one of our most difficult tasks. We try to think of everything and plan for every eventuality, so the Members can just get on and enjoy the weekend.

#### What is the main aim of the weekend?

It's really important to have a cross section of the membership attend both the weekend and the AGM. The weekend was then organised to be a really social event to allow for Members and their partners/guests to meet each other and enjoy our Association's comradeship. It is about having fun, sharing experiences and learning about the many things that Blesma can offer.

#### How did this year's event go?

It was a great success and we've had some wonderful feedback, although there are always a few things you want to iron out for the following year. For me, the nicest thing was finishing the gala dinner on Saturday and being able to see the different generations mingling and socialising at the bar. The essence of Members' Weekend is connectivity, and that is something Blesma is proud to achieve in everything it does.

#### Do you have the time to enjoy it?

You almost wish the time away when you're managing events because you want each bit to be a success and you're always focusing on the next part. But there's a huge sense of accomplishment for the team when we look around and see the Members enjoying themselves. Watching everyone having fun was very special and reinforces how important Blesma is in our Members' lives.

#### What will be happening in 2025?

We will be back at Forest Pines. We have listened to the feedback and will be making some tweaks, and we are hoping to welcome even more first-timers.

# Blesma Awards 2023: The recipients

Every year, during the gala dinner at Members' Weekend, the Blesma Awards are presented to their deserving winners. This year, the combined talent, selflessness and dedication on show were as humbling as ever. Let's meet this year's recipients...



Photography: PDRphotos

## THE JACK TRIGG MEMORIAL AWARD 2023

**Awarded to Stacey Quirk**

**T**his award, which recognises personal endeavour or sporting agility, was established in memory of Blesma Member Jack Trigg, who served in the Welsh Guards in WWII and lost an arm in Normandy in 1944. This year, it is awarded to Stacey Quirk.

Stacey was a Combat Medical Technician serving with 1 Med Regt in Germany and deployed to Afghanistan as an augmentee when she suffered a career ending injury in 2007. She had seven years of surgeries before needing a through-knee amputation to her right leg in May 2014.

She was medically discharged in 2015 and needed an above-knee amputation in 2017 as she adapted to life outside service. Stacey has viewed every setback as a challenge and has made incredible sporting achievements alongside a full-time job in the NHS and studying for a degree. She has represented Team GB at sitting volleyball and para ice hockey, and now plays amputee football.

Her para ice hockey has been supported by the Venture Fund, but she has also invested a lot of her own time and money to train and compete. Stacey has also studied for three academic degrees, the latest in behavioural science which she wants to use to help patients throughout their healthcare journeys. She currently works as a psychological therapist in the NHS.

Maintaining high calibre performance requires dedication and unwavering commitment, and that has resulted in her continued presence at the heart of Team GB's para ice hockey women's team and selection for the co-ed GB squad.

She has faced daily challenges but deploys courage, fortitude and quiet determination to move forward in her life. Her upbeat, positive frame of mind and relentless will to succeed and make a better life for herself, and others, are inspirational.



## THE HAMBRO AWARD 2023

### Awarded to Hari Budha Magar

**T**his award recognises high achievers displaying exceptional commitment and dedication in any field. It was established in memory of Blesma Member Major J O Hambro MC, a former chairman and treasurer of Blesma, who served with the Coldstream Guards and lost a leg in Normandy in 1944. The 2023 Hambro Award goes to Hari Budha Magar.

The former Royal Gurkha Rifles corporal became the first double above-knee amputee to summit Mount Everest when he stepped onto the top of the world with his specially-crafted prosthetic legs that had been designed with spiked soles. The historic moment came 13 years after he lost his legs following an IED explosion in Afghanistan in 2010.

It was a towering personal triumph and a landmark achievement in a quest to positively transform perceptions of people with a disability. It was also a journey out of darkness for Hari, who hit the depths of despair following his injury and contemplated taking his own life before resolving to inspire change in global perceptions around disability.

The 44 year old has been driven by his five-year campaign to conquer Everest, setting a string of records for double above-knee amputee climbers along the way. The impact has resonated through the disabled community; from youngsters inspired to take on challenges big and small, to governments and institutions focusing on investing in facilities and opportunities.

Hari, who joined the Army as a 19 year old and served for 12 years, has fought through personal and physical adversity to conquer his demons and the world's tallest mountain, and has shown the world that disability does not limit achievement.

He continues to climb and inspire.



## THE CYRIL STEPHENS AWARD 2023

### Awarded to Elaine Duggan

**T**his award is in memory of Blesma Member Cyril Stephens OBE, one of the founder Members of the Association who was honorary auditor for Blesma from 1932 until 1947, and national president from 1949 until his death in 1956. It recognises the work undertaken by Blesma supporters, and this year it is awarded to Elaine Duggan.

Elaine is a Blesma Widow who is a long-time Blesma supporter and prolific fundraiser for the Association. She raised funds with her husband Richard, who was injured while serving with the Royal Green Jackets in Northern Ireland, and continued to raise funds after he passed away in 2005. Last year, she raised more than £6,500.

The couple met when they were rehabilitating at the same hospital after Elaine had been injured in the line of duty as a police officer. Elaine now lives at Stoll's Chiswick War Memorial Homes in London. Among her many fundraising activities, she knits poppies and scarves to sell locally.

She is an ambassador for Blesma and discusses and promotes the Association with people she meets. She also checks in on another Blesma Member who lives close by. Elaine continues to raise funds for the Association and for air ambulances, and 'Rifleman Richard Duggan' will feature on the side of one of the London Air Ambulance's new helicopters in recognition for her, and her late husband's, efforts and generosity.

Elaine dedicates her time, energy and positivity to Blesma in recognition for its support for her and her late husband, and to selflessly give back to others.



BSO Sarah Payne  
accepts the award  
on behalf of Mike

## THE FRANKLAND MOORE TROPHY 2023

### Awarded to Mike Screech

**T**his award is in memory of Dr Charles Frankland Moore OBE and his wife Dr Elizabeth Frankland Moore OBE who were held in very high esteem by Blesma Members as a result of their vital work after World War II in securing Blesma's strong financial position. This trophy recognises the work undertaken by Blesma's Welfare Volunteers, our 'Welfare Reps', and this year is awarded to Mike Screech.

Mike served for 24 years in the Royal Navy and became a Blesma Member in 2019, instantly volunteering to help others. He became the South West Welfare Rep and diligently stayed in touch with his 'flock' throughout Somerset with calls and visits which have always been warmly welcomed. At times, he represented a lifeline for Members who were isolated or struggling.

Mike, who sadly passed away a week before Members' Weekend, experienced his own health issues for a time, but they did not deter his efforts and energy to continue his calls and visits for a catch-up and a cup of tea with Members. He participated in various Blesma activities, from online yoga and crafting to Seniors Week and photography courses, and made many friends around the UK.

His conscientious nature and willingness to give and raise funds provided a wealth of support to Members and the Association. His fundraising included making knotted keyrings and donating the proceeds of his book based on his life, *Life In a Blue Suit and Different Coloured Neckers*, to Blesma.

His tireless efforts were a huge help to Blesma's ability to provide a wide range of support, while his positive personality meant the world to Members who had the benefit of his contact and friendship.



## THE EARL OF ANCASTER MEMORIAL AWARD 2023

### Awarded to Pete Turner

**T**his award was established in memory of Blesma Member Major The Earl of Ancaster KCVO TD who served in the Leicestershire Yeomanry in World War II and lost a leg in Normandy in 1944. It recognises the work undertaken by a Blesma volunteer, and this year it is awarded to Pete Turner.

Pete is a Chelsea Pensioner who is a tireless advocate and supporter of Members throughout his local Sutton, Merton and District Branch and beyond.

He has given huge amounts of time to Blesma, selflessly helping Members and acting as an ambassador for the Association. He has arranged five tours of the Chelsea Hospital for Members, paying for their lunches and refusing to accept contributions.

Pete has attended fishing and sailing trips with Blesma during which he has actively supported other Members so they can make the best of the opportunities. He has also arranged for Members to be involved in Outreach work at the Chelsea Hospital which gives them great personal satisfaction and helps the wider veteran community.

He is a positive member of his Branch and this year volunteered to be part of the committee. Pete is always looking for ways to benefit Members and has liaised with the REME regimental association to access additional support.

Pete is a role model for volunteers, and his energy and commitment have a direct benefit on the welfare of Members.



## SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD

### Awarded to Eva Georgiou

**R**ecognising a remarkable individual who has made an extraordinary impact on Blesma and the lives of many. This special recognition is in memory of Eva Georgiou, whose dedication, passion and resilience have left an indelible mark on the Association.

Eva approached Blesma in early 2022, seeking to explore a corporate partnership with her employer, NRS Healthcare. By October 2022, this partnership was formally launched thanks to Eva's unwavering belief in Blesma's mission and her exceptional ability to inspire others to join our cause. Eva's connection to Blesma was deeply personal as her fiancé, a military veteran, was friends with a Member.

From the very first meeting, Eva's enthusiasm and creativity shone through. She envisioned numerous ways NRS could support Blesma, turning this partnership into her personal mission. Over a span of just 18 months, Eva was responsible for raising more than £22,000 through various initiatives.

Eva took on the London Marathon in 2023. Despite being diagnosed with cancer in 2019 and enduring the challenges of chemotherapy, she completed the marathon in 4 hours and 50 minutes. In August 2023, Eva, alongside her colleagues and fiancé Louie, participated in the Dorset Plane Pull, raising funds by pulling a Boeing 737 at Bournemouth Airport.

Eva's dedication extended beyond fundraising, and her efforts led to significant collaborations, including with Ukraine charities. Tragically, Eva passed away on 15 February 2024, at the age of 35. In her memory, an additional £6,500 has been raised, reflecting the profound impact she had on the Blesma community.



## My Members' Weekend

### Susi Rogers-Hartley

*Susi, who suffered a spinal injury whilst serving in the Royal Navy, was attending her first Members' Weekend. The 59 year old, who has represented GB at para ice hockey and is a keen horse rider, was delighted when she received the invite*

#### Was this the first Members' Weekend you applied for?

I'd tried before but didn't make the list, so I was thrilled when I got the news. The event is always over-subscribed, and although I attended as someone else's guest once, this was the first real time for me.

#### What were your highlights?

The dancing; I haven't made moves like that for 20 years! The entertainment was excellent and I loved the venue. Another highlight was the forest walk around the golf course; it was just lovely to get out and relax. The meals were really good and the company was great. It was just a shame it was only three days!

#### Were you able to catch up with old friends?

I hadn't seen Bob Monkhouse for about 20 years, and he was

on my table at the gala dinner, so it was fantastic to see him.

It was lovely to meet so many other people, too.

#### What activities did you try?

I did the mosaics and the boxing – both were brilliant for different reasons.

#### What were your overall impressions of the weekend?

I loved every minute of it – it was fantastic. I've been a Blesma Member for 24 years and wouldn't be here today without them. I've had so many lows, but the Association has always been there to pick me up and give me a new direction. I became a horse rider and trainer and the first wheelchair user to represent Great Britain at showjumping. Members' Weekend is yet another fantastic thing they do for us. It was phenomenal!

# The Blesma Storytelling and Wellbeing Programme

The Blesma Storytelling and Wellbeing Programme (BSWP) offers Blesma Members a series of high-quality storytelling and creative workshops. The next season of workshops will run from October 2024 until February 2025 and will offer opportunities to learn creative skills and to connect with people via a mix of online and in-person workshops.

## OCTOBER

**Online** Authority, leadership and presentation skills with Al Nedjari

## NOVEMBER

**Online** Seasonal stories for newcomers to storytelling

**Online** Keep it fresh – storytelling workshop for experienced storytellers

## DECEMBER

**London** Developing your story for an audience – a three-day project

**Online** Creative writing with Elspeth McColl

**Online** A Christmas social led by The Drive Project

## JANUARY

**Nottingham** Seasonal stories for newcomers to storytelling

**Sheffield** Keep it fresh – storytelling workshop for experienced storytellers

**Exeter** Blesma Voices – a songwriting workshop with David Tims

**Cardiff** Unlocking imagination – a storytelling workshop with Phil Okwedy

## FEBRUARY

**Newcastle** A two-day sculpture workshop with Simon Weston

**Online** Campfire sharing

BSWP workshops are fully accessible and open to the entire Blesma membership unless stated otherwise (subject to completion of an onboarding process and space availability).

The Drive Project ensures that the workshops are safe, inclusive and respectful environments with clear guidelines so that everyone is able to get the most out of their experience.

To find out more, or to book any of the workshops, please email [activities@blesma.org](mailto:activities@blesma.org)



Email [activities@blesma.org](mailto:activities@blesma.org)

# Bulletin

## Learning the power of a well-told story

*The new Storytelling and Wellbeing Programme teaches Members much more than simply how to tell a story*

**T**he Association's Storytelling and Wellbeing Programme visited Members in Northern Ireland and Scotland recently for in-person workshops. The sessions took place in Belfast and Dunfermline, and began with some trepidation from the group, but that quickly dissipated thanks to mutual support and by agreeing some rules which fostered a safe environment for sharing.

The programme involves online and in-person workshops that guide Members in how to use language, their voice and their energy to express themselves. It builds the confidence by teaching the techniques and skills to tell stories, hold conversations and connect with people in various situations.

The feedback from participants at both sessions was overwhelmingly positive.

"It's easy to be in this environment, explore your stories safely and open up. I feel like I can say something now," said one attendee. "I felt more confident by the end of the day," said another.

The power of storytelling for improved wellbeing is gathering recognition, with research highlighting it as a trigger for



Members learned from a professional storyteller



the brain to release feel-good hormones such as oxytocin and suppress cortisol, which influences negative moods.

Working in both one-to-one and group settings, Members shared their thoughts and emotions. By the end of the workshops, you could visibly see and clearly hear that confidence had soared and there were stories to be told. The workshops not

only enhanced Members' storytelling skills but also fostered a sense of community and a shared understanding and respect – it was a privilege to be part of the days.

A number of workshops will take place over the next few months. For details on both the in-person and online workshops, please email [activities@blesma.org](mailto:activities@blesma.org), visit [www.blesma.org/activities](http://www.blesma.org/activities) or see opposite.

**“It’s easy to be in this environment, explore your stories safely and open up. I feel like I can say something now”**

# Wales and West: Airshows, icy plunges and generous donations

**A**nother three months packed with activities, social lunches, Armed Forces Day events and wellbeing support for our deserving Members and Widows. The summer calendar rushed by, with Wales and West seeing an increase in calls for support and advocacy, and more Members getting involved in activities.

## DISABILITY AIDS, ADAPTATIONS AND LIFESTYLE SUPPORT

BSO Tom Hall has been busy in the office and out on the road introducing himself to new Members and supporting those most in need. There has been an increase in those needing home adaptations while some local authorities are taking longer to step in to help. Fortunately, Blesma is there to help when statutory services cannot provide the support when required. Tom spends a lot of time sitting on various Armed Forces Covenant forums within local councils, NHS health board groups and community support hubs trying to find the right level of support – at the right time – for the membership.

This has become much more difficult taking into account a drop in funding across partners and agencies. The ability for Blesma to access quick and professional occupational therapy (OT) assessments and home independence support has often been instrumental in getting disability and mobility aids to Members who need them urgently. This can also be said for counselling services which are ever more needed, with Blesma able to use a reputable private company to counsel Members and support them through their difficult life experiences.

Tom and his Outreach Officer, Jason, have carried out more than 50 visits to Members at home, in Limb Centres and at other venues to ensure those who are a priority for help get it quickly. Support over the past three months has included home repairs, adaptations, decorating grants, garden maintenance, wheelchair funding, stairlift fitting, transport to appointments, urgent removal of bees



**Blesma volunteer Amanda Fisher braves the weather at the Swansea National Airshow**

from a home, urgent medical support through NHS services and much more. Blesma has the unique ability to help across a wide spectrum of issues and can respond quickly when needed.

## FUN-PACKED AND DARING OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Jason has delivered almost 40 Outreach activities and social lunches in the last three months, helped one of our Members put on a cycle ride across Wales (see p30) and assisted with national Blesma fundraising events. Members have once again enjoyed daring events such as track racing and Europe's longest zip line, which is in North Wales. Our social groups are slowly gathering interest and we now have a Wrexham Group.

## SWANSEA NATIONAL AIRSHOW

For the past three years Swansea has held the National Airshow, which features organisations ranging from the emergency services, cadets and Armed Forces to the Women's Institute, food services,

employment agencies and many charities. This year's event was a vibrant and buzzing two days along the Swansea seafront with thousands gathering to watch the amazing air acrobatics, which culminated in the fabulous Red Arrows Display Team.

Members John Jones, Frank Bowen, Geraint Hillard, Bruce Falkenberg and Carol Pugsley, as well as some of their partners and carers, and Blesma volunteers, kindly gave up their time to help Tom and Jason show Blesma off to the crowds.

After a rough start with bad weather blowing many of the tents over, the day burst into sunshine. Valuable funds were raised and many visitors went away having met happy, resilient veterans and having learned a little bit more about the effects of limb loss. Wales and West even picked up two new Members during the event! A huge thank you to everyone involved.

## FIRE AND ICE (CARDIFF)

When it comes to Outreach activities, Tom and Jason are focusing their attention on health and wellbeing, physical activity





“It left me feeling pumped and energised,” said Geraint Hillard (above, third from right) about the session at the Mountain Yoga Studio



**Member Rob Bugden prepares to take on Europe’s longest zip line in North Wales**

and social connection. They decided to put on a session at the Mountain Yoga Studio on the outskirts of Cardiff. What an experience for the bunch who (literally) threw themselves into it! Organised and run by an ex-29 Commando, the activity involved learning specialist breathing techniques, exercising in a hot tent and taking a series of icy plunges – all while trying to stay calm and relaxed. It was



**Swansea Social Group is given a generous donation from Carol Pugsley’s sister, Marie**

a fantastic experience, with everyone bonding and embracing the cold.

“I really enjoyed it and it’s definitely something I would recommend for other members,” said Member Geraint Hillard. “It left me feeling pumped and energised afterwards, and I even feel like I slept better. The activity didn’t have any negative effect on my stump or phantom pains.”

### **GENEROUS DONATIONS FROM MARIE AND CHRIS**

In August, the Swansea Social Group found out that Member Carol Pugsley’s sister, Marie, had been given two pieces of life-changing news. Firstly, she had received news of a substantial financial windfall, but shortly after she was given the devastating information that she had a terminal illness. Marie is a wonderful, kind-hearted soul who thinks of others before herself. One of the first things she and her husband Chris did was to donate £5,000 to the Association for supporting her sister, Carol, after her amputation. Thank you Marie and Chris.

### **REFERRALS**

Clinicians, professional partners or Members can contact Tom and Jason using the details on p68. They can also refer veterans to Blesma using the website ([www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org)) or the Wales and West referral form, which can be sent on request. **Tom Hall (Support Officer) and Jason Suller (Outreach Officer)**

# Scotland: Forest adventures, walking on air and cream teas

**S**ummer was busy for the Scotland Outreach programme, with a host of outdoor activities and events designed to embrace the warmer weather. The sun didn't always make an appearance – with wind and rain a regular feature – but that didn't dampen the enthusiasm of our hardy Scottish Members!

## A WATERY THEME

It was lovely to see so many children at our family day at Lochore Meadows with Fife Sailability. Everyone enjoyed the powerboat trips around the loch, whilst the more sedate sat back and relaxed on *Kitty*, the sailing dinghy. After a morning of exercise, we were rewarded with delicious homemade cakes baked by a Member's wife and granddaughter. It was great to be joined by Fiona from Reading Force, who came armed with books for all the young people.

Later in the month, a few of our Members boarded Able2Sail's 46-foot yacht on the River Clyde. Everyone took their turn helming the boat and working the sails. Both days provided perfect conditions, with great sails across to Dunoon and down to the Isle of Bute. Plenty of sea life was observed including diving gannets, cormorants, and even an unidentified fin in the water!

## FOREST ADVENTURE

A second family day took place at Landmark near Aviemore. The forest adventure park provided a great day out with water slides, a high-rope course, trampolines that were strung up amongst the beautiful Caledonian pine trees, a butterfly house and lots more. For once, the sun shone and those pesky Scottish midges stayed away. It's fair to say there were some tired children and adults by the end of the day!

## WALKING ON AIR

A popular annual event in the Scottish Outreach calendar is gliding at Portmoak Airfield. This year, seven Members took to the skies with both plane tug launches



An afternoon tea in Aberdeen gave Members and their families the chance to chat



A family day at Fife Sailability



Gliding at Portmoak Airfield



Chatting over afternoon tea in Dundee



The Japanese Garden at Cowden

## Midlands: Rugby, rifles and arrows at the ready!

and winch launches. I was very thankful there wasn't time for me to have a go but I am assured the views and the tranquillity once in the air were well worth it.

### OPTRONIC MASTS AND 'DIGITAL CREW'

In May, Members enjoyed a fascinating tour around Thales. The Glasgow site, formally established as Barr & Stroud, has expertise in optical-electronic systems in support of land, sea and air forces, and is the sole supplier of periscopes and optronic masts to the Royal Navy. After a brief introduction with coffee and cakes, we were shown around the factory and given a demonstration of the 'digital crew' artificial intelligence system and some of the armoured vehicle targeting systems and sights. In the periscope hall, there were masts awaiting refurbishment. It was unbelievable to hear that the pressure testing vessel used today is the same one which was used by a Member's father when he was employed by Barr & Stroud!

### CREAM TEAS AND CHATS

Anything involving food is usually a popular event, and the afternoon teas held in Dundee and Aberdeen were no exception. Sixteen Members enjoyed a lovely spread of sandwiches, cakes and pastries at Dobbies Garden Centre. Events like these are great for giving Members and their partners an opportunity to chat and share stories. Both afternoons were lovely occasions, and it was wonderful to see some new faces to the Outreach programme.

Cream teas were also the order of the day after a visit to the Japanese Garden at Cowden. The garden, based around a lake, has many unique plants and trees as well as structures with Japanese cultural significance. After a short guided walk, Members were free to walk around the garden, or just sit in one of the shelters and contemplate the peacefulness and serenity. It certainly took your mind away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life.  
*Rachael Kennedy, Outreach Officer*



Recent trips include a day out at Dudley Zoo and an archery session in Nottinghamshire

**T**his summer saw Team Midlands in full flow despite all the rain early on. Events with Outreach Officer Sarah, including archery, shooting and several brunches across the region, have been well attended. I have seen the benefit these activities have for Members, encouraging social interaction, and giving the chance to make bonds and to give and receive advice from peers.

At-home activities like a cupcake making competition provided another chance to try something new, either individually or with younger family members. The benefits to mental and physical wellbeing have been incredible, and we continue to work hard to provide exciting opportunities for everyone.

### SHOOTING

The Derby Rifle and Pistol Club 1999 (DRPC 1999) hosted a group of 21 from the area as we tried a variety of weapons – including a musket! It was fantastic to see 21 people on parade for this event, both familiar and new faces – and there proved to be some fantastic marksmen among us!

A mini competition for the tightest grouping using a .22 rifle was won by Jordan Ralphs, with Paul Woolley in second and Ian Houlgrave in third. Well done gents! Watch out DRPC 1999 – we will definitely be back!

### ARCHERY

Ten people, including Members, carers and partners, attended an archery event at the Sherwood Foresters in Nottinghamshire. The team there were amazing, and all the Members and their guests were treated fantastically, with one-to-one support for each team. Everyone gave a sterling effort and there may have been a little bit of banter and competition as a few Members renewed old skills while others tried it for the first time.

### LEICESTER TIGERS RUGBY CLUB STADIUM TOUR

Members took the Blesma luck to the Leicester Tigers' last rugby match of the 2024 season. A group of Members were given an access-all-areas guided tour of the ground and had a bite to eat before they watched from behind the posts as the Tigers won their final match of the season against the Exeter Chiefs.

### BRUNCHES

Brunches provide welcome company and the chance to chat and engage with fellow Members and staff over a nice breakfast. The last few months have seen more than 21 Members as well as their spouses/carers attend three brunches across the region.  
*Sarah Criddle, Outreach Officer*

# Northern Ireland: Exploring the 'Five Steps to Wellbeing'

**W**elcome to our regional update which highlights the most recent activities and events. This year, we have been exploring the five steps to wellbeing – Connect, Keep Learning, Be Active, Take Notice and Give – and have incorporated these principles into our activities and events.

## CONNECT

Good relationships can help you build a sense of belonging and self-worth. It is hoped that through Outreach activities and events you are inviting those connections to be made. A number of Members recently visited a local Men's Shed; a space where men can work on projects together and share their knowledge and skills. "It may not be what you make or mend that is most important – it is the friendships that are built," said Outreach Officer, Fiona. An upcoming 'Caring and Sharing' day is aimed at providing a warm space for our Widows, spouses and carers to come together to share experiences, relax and chat about anything and everything.

## KEEP LEARNING

There are so many ways to bring learning into your life, and we were fortunate to experience a chutney-making workshop and cheese-pairing class. Our at-home activity was aimed at learning in your own time with the project being the art of book folding, and we continue to broaden our horizons by reading and sharing reviews through our book club.

## BE ACTIVE

Keeping active is a great way to improve your physical and mental health. For some of our Members, that means being involved in sports such as wheelchair basketball, archery, lawn bowls and open water swimming. Congratulations to Paul Lawler who participated in archery at the British Transplant Games in Nottingham, where he won a silver medal.

Meanwhile, the Grow Your Own project focuses on keeping mobile and motivated



Members and volunteers turned out in force to represent Blesma on Armed Forces Day



Paul Lawler winning archery silver

in the garden, and Members are ready to reap their harvests. Elsewhere, Blesma families had a fun day at Ark Open Farm, where the little ones could tire you out just by watching them!

## TAKE NOTICE

It is widely reported that paying more attention to the present moment can have a positive impact on your mental wellbeing, and we incorporated this theme into our activities with a visit to the stunning Drenagh Gardens in Limavady. It was



Mastering the art of book folding

an opportunity to slow the pace down, take in the views, relax and catch up leisurely.

## GIVE

We recognise that giving can provide a feeling of purpose and self-worth, and we must thank our Outreach volunteers and those who raise funds for the charity for their time. Armed Forces Day is always a favourite in the calendar, with Members and volunteers on hand to support throughout the day.

**Fiona Morrison, Outreach Officer**

# Area round-up: What's been going on where you live?

## London and the South East

### WHITE WATER RAFTING

In July, Members took the plunge and went white water rafting at the Lee Valley Water Centre in a joint event with the East area. Eighteen Members took part in two rafts. It was a fun day out and a great activity for team building, self-confidence and experience, with lots of laughter and smiling faces. Many Members enjoyed the challenge and said they would do it again.

### GOLF DAY

In August, the area teamed up with the East area to organise a golf day. The event was held at The Birchwood Park Golf & Country Club in Kent. Teams were made up of a mix of players from both areas, with three groups playing in a 'Texas Scramble' format. The winning team came in with a Stapleford score of 64.

It proved to be a fun day of golf and team bonding, and we intend to make it an annual tradition, with next year's event being hosted by the East area.

A special thank you to Andrew Haugen and Michaela for joining us and taking some fantastic photographs.

### TOWER OF LONDON

In August, The Veterans Games invited several Members to attend an event at the Tower Of London. This included a guided tour by Yeoman Warder Andy Merry, who is a former Royal Marine and Veterans Games participant. This was a very special event to attend, and Members experienced a memorable evening.

**Jess Linge, Outreach Officer**

## South

Outreach Officer Amy Barnes and members of the South area attended a fantastic day of music, food and fun at



Members from several areas came together to take part in a golf day in Kent



The Brading Haven Yacht Club on the Isle of Wight named Blesma as its charity recipient

the Brading Haven Yacht Club on the Isle of Wight on Saturday 27 July. The event was organised and run by Blesma supporter and veteran Gordon Wight, who is the club's events co-ordinator. After hearing about Blesma from his brother, who is a big supporter of the charity, Gordon chose the Association as the yacht club's charity recipient of the year.

The sun shone brightly on the day and all in attendance were greatly entertained by local band The Wight Hot Pipes, who kindly donated their fee to the fundraising

effort. A silent wine auction was also carried out and people bid generously on the selection. The crowd were moved and greatly inspired by a local Blesma Member who took to the mic and shared his story, praising Blesma for the support he has received over the years.

The event raised more than £3,000 and the yacht club plans to continue to support Blesma at other events in the future. Thanks to all those involved in the day for their kindness and generosity.

**Amy Barnes, Outreach Officer**

# News from the Branches: Celebrating a very busy summer

## BOURNEMOUTH BRANCH

What happened to the summer? Down in Bournemouth we had it in instalments – a couple of days here and a couple of days there. The poor tourists didn't know if they were coming or going. However, the Bournemouth Branch still thrives in its gentle way.

We had our first joint venture with the Southampton Branch, with a visit to The National Motor Museum. All were welcome and were free to roam on what turned out to be a beautiful day. We then all met up for a picnic lunch in a big marquee – it was very enjoyable and well attended.

The Branch held its annual away meeting in Dorchester in June which was well attended, and we met our new Trustee Neil Heritage. It was good to see him and introduce him to the Branch.

June is a busy month that includes the annual trek to Weymouth for Armed Forces Day. There were not so many stalls this year, but it was a beautiful day and therefore a fair turnout. The collection went to HQ, next year is our turn.

Then a long haul to the AGM, it was quite a trek but nice to see so many friends. The hotel was very good, and the Gala Dinner was excellent but in my opinion the access was poor; I had to take four lifts to get to the meeting and they were not always working. But, like all Blesma Members, we persevered. Come Monday the long trip home again.

### A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY:

14 December Christmas Lunch,  
Hotel Miram

**Peter Sherston-Baker, Chairman**

## NOTTINGHAM BRANCH

The Nottingham Branch continues to flourish, regularly welcoming new members and meeting on numerous occasions throughout the year.

On Saturday 18 May we held a Branch and Blesma fundraising/awareness stand at Thoresby Hall, Nottinghamshire. We joined the Spirit of Wartime military event for the first time and, through our Branch



**Above: Armed Forces Day in Weymouth**  
**Left: Nottingham Branch holds its Summer Dinner at Colwick Hall**

Members chatting to members of the public at the event, we were able to showcase some of the incredible ways that Blesma supports its Members. We were also able to raise some much-needed funds through Jayne Waring's amazing cake stall. A big thank you goes out to Jayne and her family for all their hard work!

We recently held our annual Branch Summer Dinner at Colwick Hall, which was once the ancestral home of the famous poet Lord Byron. Members (including family and carers) were able to enjoy a three-course a la carte meal in beautiful surroundings on the banks of the River

Trent, next to Nottingham Racecourse. Our remaining 2024 meeting/lunch will be held at The Vale Hotel, Daybrook, Nottingham on 12 November at 11.30. We are also planning our Christmas Lunch at The Orchard Hotel and Restaurant once again, date to be confirmed.

If you are interested in joining the Branch or would like to know more about our activities, please contact the Branch Honorary Secretary Dave Ledger at [secretary.nottingham@blesma.org](mailto:secretary.nottingham@blesma.org) or on 07794 309927.

**Many thanks**

**David Ledger, Honorary Secretary**



Members of Sutton, Merton and District Branch celebrate the Branch's 75th anniversary



Members of Southampton, Winchester and District Branch on board the *Alison Macgregor*

### SOUTHAMPTON, WINCHESTER AND DISTRICT BRANCH

One effect of the Covid-19 virus over the last two years or so is that it has sadly reduced all Branch activities, including our summer social activities and the outings on the boat *Alison Macgregor*. However, the Branch committee has been very active in keeping in touch with all our Members and Widows, either by email or telephone, should any problems arise. We hope that the Blesma family is well, and we send the Branch's good wishes to all.

At our AGM in March 2021, the members appointed David Rowe as our Chairman

and Gloria Ellerker as our Vice Chairlady. This was endorsed in March 2022 and they are supported by Jacquie Brodrick, our Welfare Officer and myself as Honorary Secretary and Treasurer. Caroline Pedrick is our Social Secretary and the rest of the committee is made up by Margaret Savage, Stephen Bailey and Joyce Meader.

The Branch meets on every fourth Monday at the Totton Community Centre. Any Member or Widow living in the area who wishes to join the Branch would be most welcome and should contact me (Stephen Coltman) on 01202 764168.

The Branch would also like to thank

Pat Donnachie (BSO(S)) and the Blesma HQ team in Chelmsford for all their support. This came to the fore during Covid and the support we received was excellent. Thank you all.

We have resumed our normal Social Lunches and the latest was on 22 June when we welcomed Blesma's Finance and Support Director, Boston Mwense, and Support Officer Pat Donnachie. We were very grateful to Caroline Pedrick for organising it.

**Stephen Coltman**  
Honorary Secretary and Treasurer

### SUTTON, MERTON AND DISTRICT BRANCH

Our Branch of the Blesma tree celebrates its 75th anniversary this year. We were left a legacy in 1949 from our esteemed predecessors which we hope we are still fulfilling. We celebrated with a delicious buffet at The Morden Brook, the local hostelry that has catered for us since 2014. Peter, our Chelsea Pensioner, carved a shield in his workshop at the Royal Hospital which was presented to the owners to show our appreciation for their dedication to us.

As usual, the lunch was a noisy affair with in-house entertainment from Maurillia, who has a fabulous voice, and Pat – our supporter from Merton Veteran Healthwatch – who surprised us all with her comedic talent.

We are blessed with wonderful Branch supporters who still raise funds for us every year. The local bowls fraternity have played for the Blesma Pairs trophies since 1949. The Smedley Trust has also given us a substantial cheque every year for decades. We thank them so much and were pleased that they were able to celebrate with us.

Blesma initiatives have been instrumental in changing lives, and at Branch level this is obvious to see. Our Branch Members and Widows are inspirational folk who face many challenges every day. It's an honour and privilege to meet up for our Branch meetings.

**Annie Macmillan, Chair**

# Henry Collins

01 December 1931 – 09 June 2024

**B**lesma has said a sad farewell to Member and incredible fundraiser Henry Collins, who has died at the age of 92. The veteran, who was known as Mr Blesma because of his fundraising, became a Member after losing a leg following an injury while on National Service in Libya in the 1950s.

Henry raised more than £1 million for the Association over the years and was an enthusiastic ambassador who dedicated much of his spare time to Blesma.

“He was raising funds for Blesma from my earliest memory,” says his son, Wayne. “He did a deal with a chain of local petrol stations to collect drivers’ unwanted coupons and we’d spend hours in front of the telly sticking them in books. It was very successful at raising funds and we

## Henry raised more than £1 million for the Association over the years

were always having pallets of goods like toasters being delivered to our house, which he would use for Blesma. Wherever he went, he would always tell people about Blesma and sing its praises because it meant so much to him. He was an outgoing, considerate and kind person, and he would help anyone. Nothing was ever any trouble.”

Henry worked as an engineering inspector after being medically discharged and became a volunteer Welfare Officer for Blesma in the North West. He lived in a bungalow in the grounds of the former Blackpool Home with his wife Edna, 90, and regularly attended Blesma events.

“Henry was an intrinsic part of Blesma for many years and had attended a Blesma meal with his wife as recently as April,” said Amanda Brownlie, Blesma Support Officer North West. “He had a fantastic array of stories about his fundraising exploits and will be greatly missed amongst the Blesma community.”



Mr Blesma: Proud Member and fundraiser Henry Collins has passed away at the age of 92



# Brian Denis Wilson

12 June 1924 – 22 May 2024

**B**rian was born in Penang, Malaysia on 12 June 1924 and lived there until he was sent back to live with his grandparents in Dublin at the age of five. He went to boarding school in the UK and seldom saw his parents throughout his school years. Brian attended only two months of a law degree at Oxford University before joining the Irish Guards during the Battle of Normandy. Later, as part of the Guards Armoured Division, he fought in the advance through France and Belgium, and took part in the liberation of Brussels and Operation Market Garden.

He was wounded at Nijmegen and, at the age of 20, had his right leg amputated below the knee. Brian learned to walk again and returned to Oxford to complete his degree before joining the Colonial Service. He had hoped to be sent to Penang but was assigned to Hong Kong. In London, he met his wife, Margaret, who had come over from Western Australia with the Australian Red Cross, and they were married in Hong Kong in 1948.

Brian became fluent in Mandarin and Cantonese and, over the years, moved up the ranks of the Hong Kong Government. He was awarded a CBE for his services to Hong Kong in 1979.

Brian and Margaret finally retired to Perth, Western Australia, and built themselves a house which allowed them a view of the sea.

Margaret died of cancer in 1992 and their eldest son, Simon, in 2006 of MND, leaving Brian with his two daughters, Kerry Jane and Sarah. After Margaret died, Brian was lonely, of course, but found much comfort and adventure in taking as many challenging bird watching tours as he could cram into each year.

Very sadly, Brian died peacefully on the flight from Perth to Heathrow on 22 May, as he was travelling to celebrate his 100th birthday with his beloved regiment, the Irish Guards.



Brian Wilson passed away several weeks before his 100th birthday

## Those who have passed away

May they rest in peace

<b>CAWKWELL R</b>	Royal Navy	29/07/24
<b>COLLINS HW</b>	Royal Engineers	09/06/24
<b>EDWARDS N</b>	Widow	12/07/24
<b>FORRESTER RE</b>	Royal Air Force	15/07/24
<b>GRAHAM I</b>	Royal Signals	14/08/24
<b>GROSE RW</b>	Royal Army Ordnance Corps	18/06/24
<b>HENNELLY JP</b>	Royal Air Force	17/06/24
<b>HORWOOD JM</b>	Widow	18/07/24
<b>JONES M</b>	Widow	31/07/24
<b>KENCH JM</b>	Queen's Regiment	23/07/24
<b>KENDELL JA</b>	REME	31/05/24
<b>LAUNDER KH</b>	Light Infantry	04/06/24
<b>MARSHALL B</b>	Royal Armoured Corps	10/05/24
<b>MARTIN PR</b>	Light Infantry	16/08/24
<b>MILES E</b>	Widow	10/06/24
<b>MOORE GH</b>	Royal Navy	04/06/24
<b>MOORE F</b>	Royal Pioneer Corps	17/06/24
<b>PATRICK JH</b>	Widow	24/07/24
<b>PINK S</b>	Widow	13/08/24
<b>RANDALL RG</b>	Grenadier Guards	31/05/24
<b>ROBERTS WE</b>	Royal Regiment Of Wales	13/08/24
<b>SCREECH ML</b>	Royal Navy	24/06/24
<b>SMALLBONE DI</b>	Widow	10/06/24
<b>WARD J</b>	Widow	20/06/24
<b>WHISSELL GA</b>	South Staffordshire Regiment	02/08/24
<b>WIECKO M</b>	Royal Engineers	03/06/24
<b>WILSON BD</b>	Irish Guards	22/05/24
<b>WRIGHT MDE</b>	Coldstream Guards	24/06/24



# 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 or other available support. Blesma Members can contact their Support Officer for further information about their benefit entitlement.

In this issue, we are covering how a War Pension may be affected by a claim for Universal Credit. This is a particularly complex area, and if you would like more information you can contact your Blesma Support Officer as it is possible that some of the information is oversimplified, or may become inaccurate over time, for example because of changes to the law.

## WHAT IS UNIVERSAL CREDIT?

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

Universal Credit is a means-tested benefit, so a claimant's income and savings will affect their entitlement. Some income, such as a War Pension or Guaranteed Income Payment, and some capital may be ignored.

### Who can claim Universal Credit?

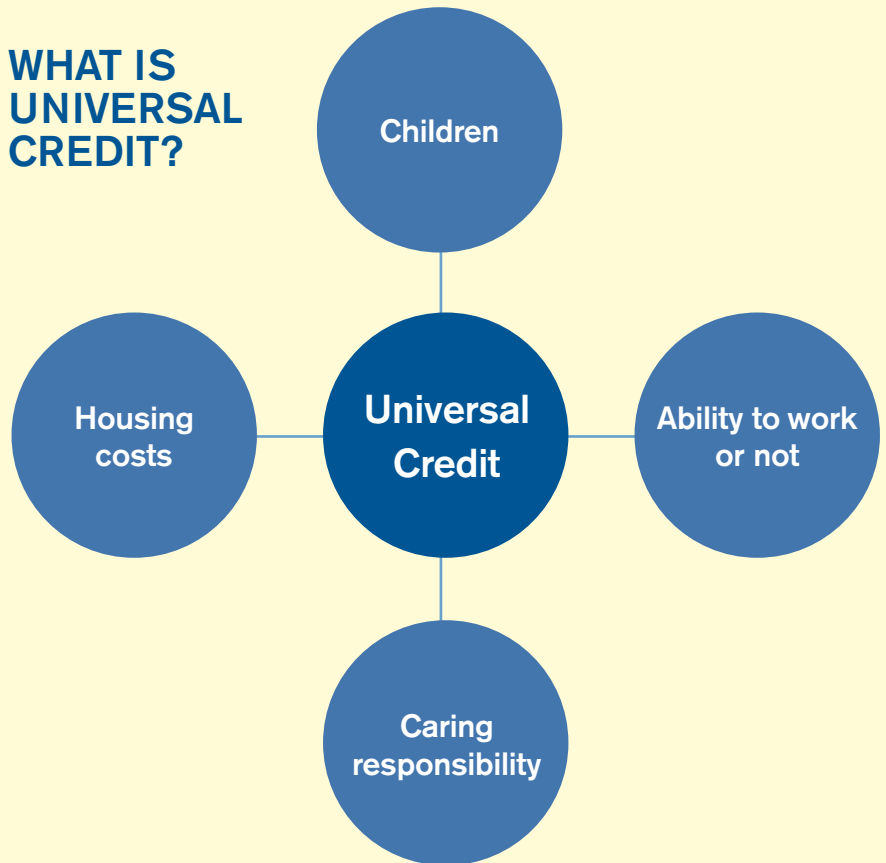
People can apply for Universal Credit if they are in or out of work and on a low income. You will usually only be able to claim Universal Credit if you are aged 18 or over and under State Pension age. Some people in this age bracket will be excluded from claiming, such as certain students.

### How is Universal Credit calculated?

Universal Credit is a single payment that is made up of different amounts depending on your circumstances. The payment will take into account:

- your earnings if you are working
- your partner's earnings if they are working

## WHAT IS UNIVERSAL CREDIT?



- 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 if your circumstances change your award may be different from one month to the next; for example, if you earn a different amount.

Some income may be ignored 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 may be expected to meet further requirements, such as look for, or prepare for, work.

Claimants will have different responsibilities depending on their circumstances. If you are out of work due to ill health or disability, you will have to take part in a Work Capability Assessment to determine whether there are further requirements attached to your claim.

### What does Universal Credit replace?

Universal Credit replaces:

- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Housing Benefit



These are known as legacy benefits. 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.

Please note that when you apply for Universal Credit, this will mean you can no longer receive these benefits or tax credits. Some people may see a decrease in income. It is important to get advice before making a claim if you are on one of the above benefits.

#### How are War Pensioners affected?

The basic War Pension depends on the degree of disability, assessed on a percentage basis, of the illness or injury caused by service before 06 April 2005. Supplementary allowances can be paid

on top of the basic War Pension where set criteria are met. There are two supplements that may be claimed dependent on a War Pensioner's ability to work. Only one of these supplements can be paid at a time.

- **Unemployability Supplement** is paid if the pensioned disablement is assessed at 60% or more and the War Pensioner has a service-related disability that permanently prevents, or severely prevents, them from working
- **Allowance for Lowered Standard of Occupation** is paid if the pensioned disablement is assessed at 40% or more and the War Pensioner has a service-related disability that prevents them from working in their regular occupation or other work of a similar standard

Within Universal Credit there is a Work Capability Amount that may be awarded within the calculation for those who are deemed as unable to work (either temporarily or permanently).

Unemployability Supplement, Allowance for Lowered Standard of Occupation and

the Work Capability Amount are all government payments due to a level of incapacity for work. Therefore, if a claim for Universal Credit includes a Work Capability amount the equivalent War Pension supplements will be affected:

- **Unemployability Supplement** will be reduced by any Work Capability Amount received
- **Allowance for Lowered Standard of Occupation** is suspended in full

#### IMPORTANT

If you claim Universal Credit and receive a Work Capability Amount within your calculation, you should inform Veterans UK if you receive a War Pension with either:

- Unemployability Supplement
- Allowance for Lowered Standard of Occupation

# Useful contact numbers across the Association

TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
<b>BLESMA SUPPORT OFFICERS</b>			
BSO (Prosthetics)	Brian Chenier	M 07796 715908	bsoprosthetics@blesma.org
BSO Eastern	Kevin Long	T 020 3954 3020 M 07825 536364	bsoeastern@blesma.org
BSO London & South East	Steven Burrell	T 020 7501 3030 M 07469 242277	bsolse@blesma.org
BSO Midlands	Vanessa Lucas	M 07825 536363	bsomid@blesma.org
BSO North East	Christine Landess	T 020 3954 3027 M 07917 972825	bsone@blesma.org
BSO North West	Amanda Brownlie	M 07825 536362	bsonw@blesma.org
BSO Scotland & Northern Ireland	Steve Burton	M 07766 258461	bsosniroi@blesma.org
BSO South	Pat Donnachie	T 020 3954 3026 M 07741 846106	bsosouth@blesma.org
BSO South West	Sarah Payne	M 07741 737563	bsosw@blesma.org
BSO Wales and West	Tom Hall	T 020 8548 7098 M 07780 165085	bsowest@blesma.org
Members Living Overseas	Steven Burrell	T 020 7501 3030 M 07469 242277	bsolse@blesma.org
<b>BLESMA OUTREACH OFFICERS</b>			
Outreach Officer Eastern	Francesca Anastasio	M 07741 661159	outreacheastern@blesma.org
Outreach Officer London & South East	Jess Linge	M 07741 845793	outreachlse@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Midlands	Sarah Criddle	M 07741845429	outreachmid@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Northern Ireland	Fiona Morrison	M 07741 744617	outreachni@blesma.org
Outreach Officer North East	Adele Miller	M 07741 847211	outreachne@blesma.org
Outreach Officer North West	Catherine Green	M 07741 846674	outreachnw@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Scotland	Rachel Kennedy	M 07884 695703	outreachscotland@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South	Amy Barnes	M 07435 283102	outreachofficersouth@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South West	Gordon Clark	M 07788 312747	outreachsw@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Wales and West	Jason Suller	M 07741 744141	outreachwest@blesma.org
<b>INDEPENDENCE AND WELLBEING</b>			
Head of Welfare Support	Colin Branch	T 020 8548 7090	hws@blesma.org
Benefits and Social Care Adviser	Liz Watling	T 020 8548 7080	iwabenefits@blesma.org
Grants Executive	Linda Harris	T 020 8548 3516	grantsexecutive@blesma.org
Membership, Branch and Volunteer Network Executive	Debbie Mayne	T 020 8548 7093	mbvexec@blesma.org
Welfare – Direct Line		T 020 8598 9459	
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>			
Head of Activities and Events	Jess March	T 020 8548 3519	activities@blesma.org
Events Coordinator	Clare Wellings	T 020 3954 3021	ae@blesma.org
Events Coordinator	Nicole Findlay	T 020 8548 7097	aelocal@blesma.org
<b>FUNDRAISING</b>			
Head of Fundraising	Anna Scalera	T 020 8548 3517	hf@blesma.org
Community and Events Manager	Abbie-Louise Mills	T 020 8548 7089	communityeventsofficersnr@blesma.org
Corporate & Regional Fundraising Mgr	Chris Knight	M 07774 797318	crfm@blesma.org

TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
<b>COMMUNICATIONS</b>			
Digital Media Manager	Nick Tuck	T 01299 896282	digitalmedia@blesma.org
Blesma Magazine			editor@blesma.org
<b>DIRECTORS</b>			
Chief Executive	Vivienne Buck	T 020 8548 3512	ce@blesma.org
Operations Director	Tony Bloomfield	T 020 8548 3513	od@blesma.org
Director Independence and Wellbeing	Ian Johnson	T 07881 308794	diw@blesma.org
Finance and Support Director	Boston Mwense	T 020 8548 3518	fsd@blesma.org
<b>USEFUL CONTACTS</b>			
Main Office		T 020 8590 1124	info@blesma.org

<b>BLESMA BRANCH OFFICIALS</b>			
<b>BOURNEMOUTH BRANCH</b>			
Chair	Peter Sherston-Baker		chair.bournemouth@blesma.org
Secretary	Mary-Jane Sweetzer		Please use Chair's email
Treasurer	Hazel Crofts		treasurer.bournemouth@blesma.org
Welfare Officer	Peter Sherston-Baker		Please use Chair's email
<b>GREAT YARMOUTH AND LOWESTOFT BRANCH</b>			
Chair	Bob Monkhouse		chair.yarmouth@blesma.org
Secretary	Helen Cullen		secretary.yarmouth@blesma.org
Treasurer	Simon Cavie		treasurer.yarmouth@blesma.org
<b>NOTTINGHAM BRANCH</b>			
Chair	Andy Fitzgerald		chair.nottingham@blesma.org
Secretary	Dave Ledger		secretary.nottingham@blesma.org
Treasurer	Keith Meakin		treasurer.nottingham@blesma.org
<b>SUTTON, MERTON &amp; DISTRICT BRANCH</b>			
Chair	Annie MacMillan		chair.sutton@blesma.org
Secretary	Karen Mason		secretary.sutton@blesma.org
Treasurer	Dave Hobson		Use Chair or Secretary at present
Welfare Officer	Gam Gurung		welfare.sutton@blesma.org
<b>SOUTHAMPTON BRANCH</b>			
Chair	David Rowe		chair.southampton@blesma.org
Treasurer and Secretary	Stephen Coltman		secretary.southampton@blesma.org
Welfare Officer	Jacqueline Brodrick		welfare.southampton@blesma.org

## Important information if you are emailing Blesma Branch officials

Anyone emailing a Branch official must use a specific Blesma email address rather than a personal account.

Previously, Members have been sending and receiving personal data in potentially unsecured emails, which has been placing the Association at risk of large penalties. Official Blesma Branch email addresses

have now been established (please see above) which ensure the Association is compliant with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

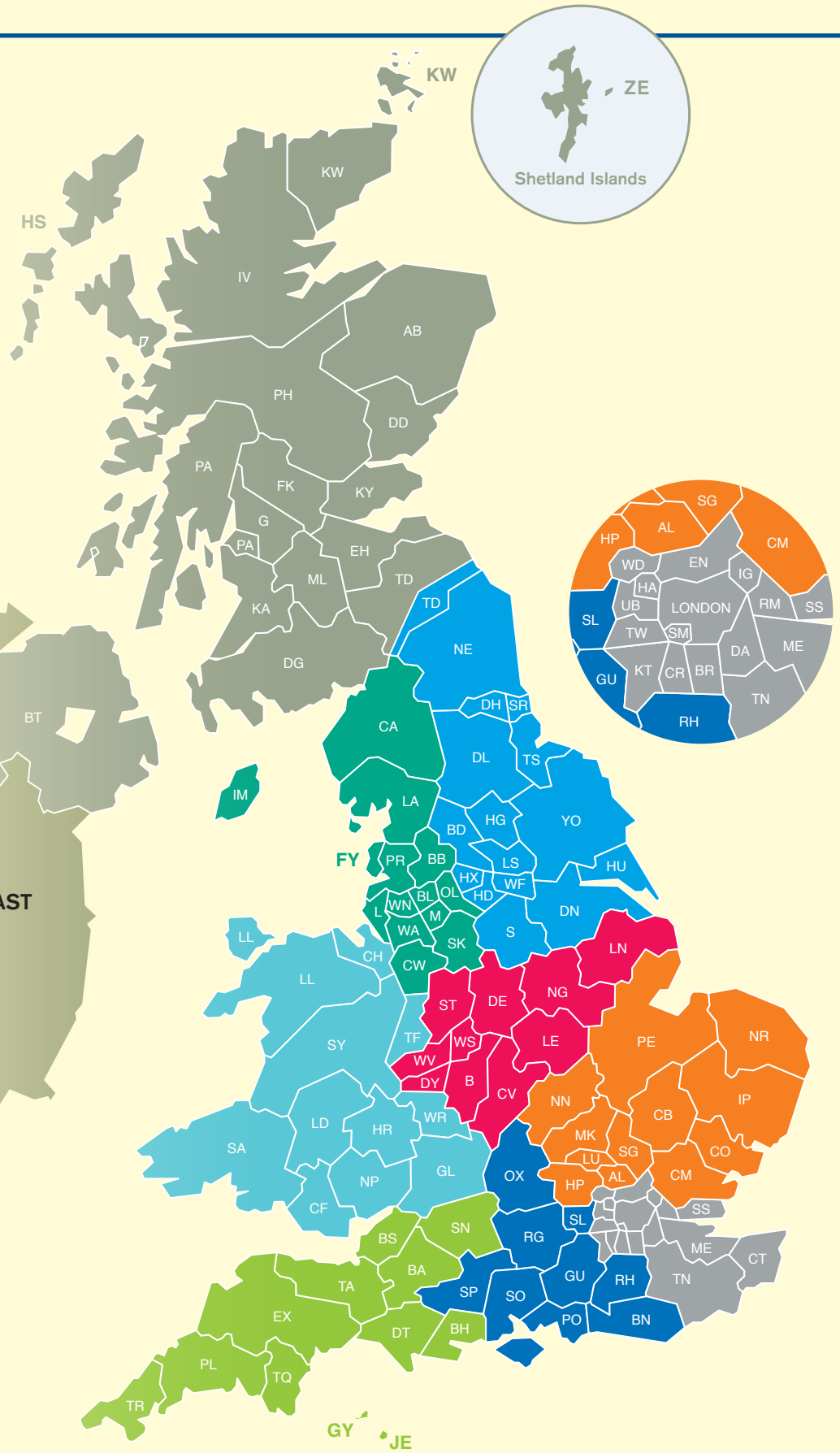
If you would like to send an email to a Branch official that is not related to Blesma activity, then personal contact information can still be used.



# 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 p68.*

- SCOTLAND & NI
- NORTH WEST
- NORTH EAST
- EASTERN
- MIDLANDS
- WALES AND WEST
- SOUTH
- SOUTH WEST
- LONDON AND SOUTH EAST



# NEXT ISSUE BLESMA GOES GLAMPING



A WEEK PACKED FULL OF GIGGLES, CUDDLES AND OUTDOOR FUN. IT DOESN'T GET ANY BETTER THAN BLESMA'S FAMILY GLAMPING TRIP

WINTER ISSUE OUT DECEMBER 2024