

Blesma

The magazine for limbless and injured veterans | Summer 2024

PLUS:
SWIMMING THE CHANNEL – AGAIN!
BENEFITS ADVICE
COMMEMORATING D-DAY 80 YEARS ON
NEWS IN YOUR AREA

BULLETIN INSIDE

THE POWER OF JOINED-UP WORKING

HOW A HEALTHY COLLABORATION IN WALES IS IMPROVING THE FUTURE FOR INJURED VETERANS



SCOTT McNEICE
HAS GONE FROM
SNOWBOARD NOVICE
TO TEAM GB HOPEFUL

ALSO: ALL THE NEWS AND VIEWS FROM ACROSS THE ASSOCIATION



“I have realised how beneficial it can be to just let go and tell a moment of your life that has real power over you”

WHAT IS THE BLESMA STORYTELLING AND WELLBEING PROGRAMME?

The Storytelling programme is a series of workshops that will be delivered online and in person from September 2024 to August 2025. Open to all Members, this is an opportunity to learn creative skills, tell stories and connect with people. You can sign up to as many workshops as you like and every workshop will be fully accessible.

Each workshop will focus on something different.

Topics will include:

- Learning new skills to boost your confidence
- Developing your creativity
- Improving your public speaking skills
- Exploring identity
- Sharing your story

Workshops are led by theatre directors, actors, trainers, artists and other creatives from the worlds of art and wellbeing.

Sign up to be the first to hear about the 2024/25 schedule, or feel free to send us your ideas for a creative workshop you'd like to see offered to Blesma Members.

Email activities@blesma.org

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Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Andy Bate

Legacy giving will be the focus of the Association's first-ever TV ad

BLESMA HAS COMMISSIONED A TELEVISION ADVERT THAT AIMS TO BRING IT TO A BRAND NEW AUDIENCE AND HIGHLIGHT HOW IMPORTANT GIFTS IN WILLS ARE IN HELPING ITS MEMBERS

Blesma is preparing to burst onto the nation's TV screens later this summer when it will embark on a major awareness and fundraising initiative.

Creative teams are in the process of working on an advert that will showcase the inspirational scope of Blesma's work to a wider audience. The advert, which will appear on Sky TV schedules, will highlight the importance of legacy giving and explain how that fuels Blesma's efforts to make physiological and psychological advances for the

limbless veteran community and support its Members to lead independent and fulfilling lives.

The Association has commissioned a leading agency after a competitive pitch process and is now focusing on the content for the commercial, which will air later this summer.

At the heart of the advert's messaging will be the outstanding reach of the Association, which recorded 950 home visits, awarded almost 4,000 grants and funded groundbreaking research during the last financial year.

Above: Cyril and Hazel Crampin have been married for 63 years. Cyril has lived as an amputee for even longer

"Gifts in Wills are an important part of Blesma's operational capability, with one in five Members being helped by funds from Wills," said Operations Director Tony Bloomfield. "It is time to tell our story to a wider audience, and a TV advert will help us reach a huge number of people."

Cyril Crampin (above) became a Blesma Member after he was involved in a traffic accident in 1955 during his National Service. He was knocked off his motorbike as he travelled home from his

Welcome

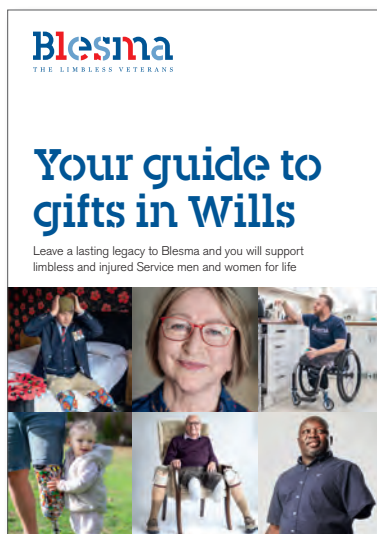
“IT’S GOOD AND FITTING TO REMEMBER THOSE WHO HAVE HELPED YOU. BLESMA HAS DONE THAT”

Army barracks, losing his right leg as a result. There are no plans for Cyril to appear in the advert, but he credits Blesma with helping him and his wife, Hazel, enjoy a full life, and has made a gift in his Will to Blesma to say thanks.

“Blesma has been there for us whenever we’ve needed support. I can pick up the phone and someone is always happy to help,” said Cyril. “I was unconscious for a week or so after the accident and sustained all sorts of injuries. I had to have my right leg amputated and my life changed out of all recognition, but I had to make the best of it.

“With a Will you always look after your family first, but it is good and fitting to remember those who have helped you – and Blesma has certainly done that for me.”

Read Cyril’s full story and find out how Blesma helped him on p50



To download a copy of Blesma’s Wills Guide visit www.blesma.org/legacy



Welcome to the summer issue. A good first half of the year has seen some inspirational and successful Member challenges, some of which have raised money for Blesma. Of particular note was Stu Pearson completing the London Marathon, Scott McNeice competing in his first full season of the Snowboarding Europa Cup, and Mat Armitage’s selection for the GB Para Climbing team. You can read about some of these in this issue.

Through the Storytelling and Wellbeing programme, Members met with injured soldiers from Ukraine in April to provide advice and support based on their own experiences. Several of the Ukrainians also ran in the London Marathon, raising funds for their injured colleagues back home. Unlike our own Services, and despite their limb loss, they returned to Ukraine on active service and joined the front line. We hope they and their families remain safe and well.

Our Fundraising Team has had some notable successes with some legacy donations early in the year and some impressive corporate events, including a fantastic evening at the Tower of London. The team has also been busy collecting at transport hubs and in shopping centres, and I’m sure they would appreciate increased Member support at future bucket collection events. If you’re free, please come along, even if it’s only for a short period of time.

I mentioned in the last magazine that we have been operating at a deficit for the last three years. Whilst we’ve been working to address a previous budget shortfall, we’re pleased to report a reduction in the deficit at the end of 2023. Ongoing fundraising efforts, cost-saving measures, and a better return on investments will ensure a strong financial future for Blesma.

The Veterans’ Mobility Fund commenced in March and is already providing assistance to our Members in need of mobility support. It is a £2.5m programme over five years that was granted to Help for Heroes and Blesma at the end of 2023 by the Office for Veterans’ Affairs.

Over the past five years, the number of Blesma Members has declined by about 10% per year, but this changed in 2023 with the first increase in several years. We warmly welcome our new Members and hope they enjoy the support and friendship that Blesma membership has to offer.

Thank you for your continued support and loyalty to Blesma. We hope you enjoy reading this edition of our magazine.

Vivienne Buck CBE
Chief Executive





Roy, now 99 years old, landed on the Normandy beaches on D-Day, 80 years ago

99-year-old Roy addresses D-Day commemoration

Roy Hayward, a D-Day veteran, was a guest of honour at the 80th anniversary commemoration of the Normandy Landings in early June, and his thoughts were firmly with those comrades who never returned home.

The 99-year-old Blesma Member, who was injured when his tank was hit on the 19th day of the offensive, was invited to the event in Portsmouth on 05 June alongside other veterans and HM The King.

“I was very honoured to be there and was asked to say a few words,” said Roy, who was 19 years old when he landed ashore on the evening of D-Day, following on from his regiment, the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry.

“My main thoughts are always with everyone who didn’t come back and how lucky I was to come home. We landed in the dark and then I joined a tank crew as we had taken casualties. It was on 25 June that the tank I was in got hit.”

Roy, who had left his job as a bank cashier to enlist in the Army, lost both his legs below the knee in the direct strike from a German Tiger tank. After being treated in four UK hospitals before a

period of rehab, he was back at work in the bank in April 1945.

Commemoration events were held across the UK and France on 05 and 06 June to pay tribute to those who took part in the D-Day Landings. The landings resulted in 4,114 Allied troops losing their lives, while a further 73,000 were killed in the ensuing Battle of Normandy.

“It is important to remember what happened and those who did not come back. My injuries were a bit of bad luck, but I have been supported by Blesma whenever I have needed them ever since,” said Roy, who was accompanied at the commemorative event by Blesma Outreach Officer South Amy Barnes. “I appreciate that I survived – I have had a good life and will always look at events that way.”

Roy, who was awarded the French Legion D’Honneur, married Barbara in 1948 and the couple lived in Surrey before retiring to the Isle of Wight in 1974. Roy has spent time as a Branch treasurer and remains a Blesma stalwart.

To find out more about Roy’s story watch the short film at www.blesma.org

TECHNOLOGY WILL OFFER NEW WAYS TO TAKE PART IN AGM

Members will be able to vote online via their phones, tablets or computers at this year’s AGM, which will once again be held during Members’ Weekend.

A new technology platform has been developed in response to a call for more ways to participate in the event, which is being held at the Forest Pines Hotel, Lincolnshire, from 29 June to 01 July.

Members who cannot attend in person will be able to follow all the discussions and cast their votes online where appropriate, while the facility will also be available to those present.

“We wanted to open up the voting process and give Members more ways to take part,” said Operations Director Tony Bloomfield. “Members will have received letters directing them to a link to the event where they can register to take part.”

This year’s AGM will take place at Members’ Weekend on Sunday 30 June.



TAKE TO THE WATER TO COMMEMORATE D-DAY

There is still time to take part in the Swim for Injured Veterans to honour those who fought on D-Day. The challenge is to swim five or 10 miles – the length of one or two of the French beaches where British troops landed on 06 June, 1944 – throughout June. Five miles is 320 lengths of a 25-metre swimming pool.

Register online at www.blesma.org/support-us/find-an-event/events/swim-for-injured-veterans/



“Blesma’s input has been life-changing,” said Stacey Mitchell

Stacey has her sights set on snowsports success

Stacey Mitchell is pushing for sporting success after making huge progress at sit-skiing after injury cut short her RAF career.

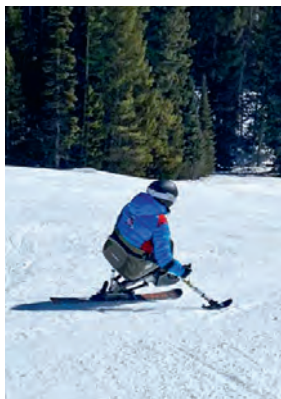
The former Senior Aircraftswoman, who worked on Chinooks at RAF Odiham, played sports for the station but suffered a training injury which was followed by nerve damage and, later, a left leg above-knee amputation.

The 30 year old, who joined up at the age of 19 but was medically discharged in 2021, has been awarded £5,000 by Blesma to purchase a sit-ski. Stacey is now lined up for three indoor slalom talent pathway sessions with GB Snowsport as her experience and skill levels improve.

“I’ve been on a few ski trips with Blesma and Armed Forces Para Snowsports but really made progress at La Plagne earlier this year with Blesma,” said Stacey. “The new sit-ski is a big boost as it works with my range of movement rather than being

a standard model set up for everyone. I want to continue to improve and it is great to have the potential to compete, but I also really benefit from the leisure aspect. Blesma’s input has been life-

changing both on and off the slopes, I couldn’t be more grateful. Their support has been vital in my transition leaving the military.”



Volunteer adaptive ski instructor Ed Bronson worked with Stacey on Blesma trips to Colorado last year as well as at this year’s annual winter snowsports trip to France. “I worked with Stacey in La Plagne as her dedicated instructor and it was remarkable to see how

much her abilities had progressed from a year ago. She has become a much more confident and skilled skier,” he said.

Stacey, who lives near Hull, also took part in the Veterans’ Games last year in the CrossFit, shooting and water polo disciplines, winning one silver and two bronze medals.

GO ALL OUT FOR A HALF MARATHON

Blesma has places for runners keen to tackle the Great North Run or the Cardiff Half Marathon.

The AJ Bell Great North Run on 08 September is the world’s biggest half marathon, while The Principality Building Society Cardiff Half Marathon will take in iconic sights of the Welsh capital on 06 October.

The registration fee for a Blesma place is £15 for Cardiff and £30 for the Great North Run, with a minimum fundraising target of £300 for each. To apply, visit the Blesma website.



FUNDRAISING TIPS TO ACE ANY EVENT

Calling all fundraisers! Whether you’re organising a cake sale, a pub quiz or a sponsored walk, Blesma values your efforts. Now, a new fundraising pack full of tips and ideas is available to help you smash your fundraising targets.

“Our fundraisers are fantastic – without them, we wouldn’t be able to support so many injured Service men and women,” said Abbie-Louise Mills, Community and Events Manager. “Whether you’re planning a solo event or are fundraising as a group, Blesma is here to help and support you.”

The pack, which also contains handy fundraising suggestions, is available in the Support Us section of the Blesma website (www.blesma.org). If you have any questions, please contact fundraising@blesma.org

Blesma committed to supporting Fighting With Pride military charity

Blesma is supporting Fighting With Pride, the LGBT+ military charity, in its mission to help resolve the challenges the community faces in their lives beyond military service. The organisation aims to establish better support for LGBT+ veterans and their families, particularly for those most impacted by the ban on LGBT+ personnel serving in the Armed Forces prior to January 2000.

Many personnel were removed from service and missed out on career benefits and rights before the ban was lifted, and Fighting With Pride has been collaborating with charities across the welfare spectrum to improve services and support.

The Government recently awarded it a £350,000 grant to create the UK's first commemoration of those in the LGBT+ community who served in the Armed Forces, and a memorial is being proposed at the National Arboretum in Staffordshire.

"We are delighted to join with other charities supporting Fighting With Pride as we are committed to helping our Members in any way possible," said Tony Bloomfield, Blesma Operations Director. "Personnel suffered mistreatment and prejudice under



the ban, and it is right that efforts have been made to recognise their rights and service. We are happy to play our part to support any Member affected by the ban."

Fighting With Pride was an integral part of a campaign that resulted in the Etherton Review 2023 that researched

more than 1,000 testimonies about the impact of discrimination and made 49 recommendations that the Government has promised to implement.

For more on Fighting With Pride, visit the website www.fightingwithpride.org.uk

SHANE IS BACK IN THE GYM AND ON A MISSION TO LIFT FOR TEAM GB

SHANE HENRY HAS POWERED BACK to strength and fitness, and is taking on a Herculean lifting challenge. The former Royal Navy engineer, whose right leg was amputated after he was diagnosed with an advanced cancer in 2019, has made the grade to enter GB-level powerlifting competitions and now has his sights on challenging the UK bench press record of 187.5kg.

"I had always been fit and worked out, but after they discovered the cancer in my leg and I had the amputation, I had a mental block about going back into the gym," said the 47 year old from Gosport.

"I had some dark times, but after a couple of years I started to get back into it. Then,

a parent from my daughter's school who was a powerlifter began helping me take it to the next level."

Shane, who now trains five days a week at PureGym in Fareham, added: "I have recently lifted 155kg at an event which qualified me for GB competitions, but I know I can definitely go even further. It would be great if I could get on the Great Britain powerlifting team, both for myself and to help others realise that their lives aren't over.

"During the dark times I felt beaten, but my amazing, strong and beautiful wife Emma carried me through and I can't thank her enough! She is my rock."



Organisers are hoping the sport will be included in the 2032 Paralympics



How you can shape the future of Para Laser Run

Blesma Members are being invited to get involved in what is hoped may become a new Paralympic sport. Former GB pentathlete Dr Nicola Robinson is trailblazing the new sport of Para Laser Run, which involves two disciplines; target shooting with a laser pistol and a run or alternative cardio element. She is aiming for the sport's inclusion at the 2032 Paralympic Games in Brisbane.

The inaugural World Para Laser Run Championships have already been held alongside a modern pentathlon event, and attracted athletes from five nationalities across seven classifications. Blesma Member Shona Brownlee was among the competitors.

A series of showcase events will be held throughout 2024 as Dr Robinson's team seeks to boost the sport, which involves 900m of running or wheelchair pushing interspersed with a laser pistol shooting station every 300m.



Para Laser Run needs to increase the number of competing nations and athletes to achieve Paralympic sports inclusion and Dr Robinson, who is now a sports and exercise lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University, is leading a project to advance participation, awareness and recognition. "It is inclusive, with several classifications, and is gathering momentum," said Dr Robinson, who is also a pathway coach for Pentathlon GB. "If you like to be challenged mentally and physically across a range of sports, you can become part of what is an amazing community. We already have some Blesma Members taking part and would like to see more. And, as we are co-creating the sport with the athletes, it is also a great chance to influence its future. Just come and have a go!"

Competitions and open events are being held at the University of Bath on 20 July. For more, contact ukparapent@ljmu.ac.uk

News in brief

ASSOCIATION URGES CAUTION IN THE FACE OF SOPHISTICATED NEW ONLINE SCAMS

Artificial intelligence is transforming many industries, from healthcare to transportation. However, this powerful technology is also being deployed by cybercriminals to launch a new wave of advanced phishing and spoofing attacks.

Phishing, which involves tricking people into revealing sensitive information such as their passwords or financial details, has long been a favourite tactic of hackers. But now, the use of artificial intelligence is making these attacks far more targeted and convincing than ever.

HERE ARE A NUMBER OF WAYS TO HELP STAY SAFE

- Check email addresses carefully for mistakes. Any Blesma email will come from @blesma.org
- Verify the sender information and don't reply to suspicious emails
- Think before clicking links – our official website is www.blesma.org
- Don't open any attachments from an unknown sender

Remember, if a message seems suspicious or too good to be true, it probably is. Trust your instincts, think before you click, and when in doubt, reach out to the sender through a different, verified channel.



Elaine Duggan (centre) raised funds for air ambulances with her husband, Blesma Member and Royal Green Jacket, Richard



Member to be honoured on new air ambulance

Richard Duggan's name will be flying high on life-saving missions with the London Air Ambulance later this year. The ex-Royal Green Jackets soldier, who passed away in 2005, will be honoured by having his name included in a list of 'London Legends' on part of the livery of a new service helicopter which will become operational later this year.

His widow, Elaine, was invited onto the helipad on top of The Royal London Hospital in March to visit one of the service's two existing MD902 Explorer helicopters that fly hundreds of emergency missions each year.

"It is a fantastic thing and he would have loved it because he was a bit of a showman," said Elaine, from Chiswick, west London. "The air ambulance staff have been so good, and to have his name flying around on one of their new helicopters will be wonderful."

Elaine, 70, a former police officer, and Richard, who was 45 when he died, were tireless fundraisers for air ambulance services around the country as well as for other charities, including Blesma.

Richard, who suffered head injuries in a bomb blast while serving in Northern Ireland that left him at risk of seizures for the rest of his life, will be remembered by the words 'Rifleman Richard Duggan' on the side of the new Airbus H135 helicopter when it is commissioned in September.

"We have always raised money for the air ambulance because it once saved Richard's life, and when I saw there was a chance for his name to be included, I wrote in about the good and funny parts of our life and what a character he was," added Elaine.

The London Legends fundraising initiative has space for 2,288 dedications to be added to the new aircraft.

TRAINING HOTTING UP AS PAIR PREPARE FOR SNOWMAN TREK

MEMBERS RICH POTTER AND RICH Davies are training for the 216-mile Snowman Trek through the Himalayas. The pair, both left leg below-knee amputees, will have to negotiate 11 mountain passes over 5,500 metres in altitude, trekking for up to eight hours a day over rough terrain punctuated with steep climbs and descents.

If successful, they will be the first amputees to complete the gruelling journey through Bhutan, which will take between 30 and 35 days in September.

"We will be going through rocky terrain and lush countryside, but at 5,000 metres above sea level there could be waist-high snow drifts!" said Rich Potter, a former Royal Logistic Corps captain, who opted for amputation five years ago after contracting sepsis following an operation.

"It will be tough, but we are determined to raise as much money as possible for Blesma and RBL. Blesma has been incredible for me – nothing is too much trouble!" said



Rich, who met Rich Davies, a 35-year-old former RAF Corporal, whilst competing at the Invictus Games.

"Blesma's Venture Fund has helped make this a reality, and we are grateful for the support. We aim to be the first amputees to complete the trek, but aside from the personal challenge we want to showcase the incredible capabilities of amputees and to inspire and raise vital funds for charity."



Could you play a vital role as a Blesma volunteer?

Blesma is looking for Members and volunteers to help with fundraising events and collections across the country. Fundraising is a critical part of Blesma's ability to provide support and advice to Members.

"If it wasn't for our Members, many of our fundraising events wouldn't happen. We're so grateful to them," said Chris Knight, Corporate and Regional Fundraising Manager. "The general public are more responsive when they see our membership supporting our collections. Meanwhile, Members who take part socialise together and enjoy the experience as well as feeling

they are giving back. If we could increase the number of Members and volunteers who are able to support fundraising events and activities it would allow us to book more collections across the country, enabling us to raise even more funds for our Association.

"We understand that people have work and family commitments, but if anyone has some spare time to help they would be playing a vital role in raising funds which will directly support other Members."

To find out more about volunteering please email fundraising@blesma.org

TAFF TO TAKE ON TOUGH CHALLENGE FOR ASSOCIATION

MEMBER DAVID 'TAFF' CHANDLER is preparing to embark on a trio of fundraising efforts for Blesma that will begin with a gruelling 100km Jurassic Coast Ultra Challenge.

The 42-year-old former 2 Mercian Regiment Section Commander has been putting in the hard yards with training runs accompanied by Brodie, his Welsh Springer Spaniel, in readiness for the arduous event that stretches from Corfe Castle to Bridport.

He will be following that up with a sponsored 'Ashes' match at Brixworth Cricket Club in Northamptonshire in August, and then a fundraising golf day at Overstone in October.

"Blesma has done so much for me so I'm really keen to do my fundraising bit," said David, who is a community football coach. "The great thing about Blesma is that it includes the whole family, which is really important. The injury happens to you but it also affects the whole family; everyone goes through the mill and they also suffer consequences from your loss.

"I hope we can raise a good amount for the Association. There's a lot involved and I couldn't do it without the support from Christopher Gather Le, Bob Hutchinson and Richard Dunham at Brixworth Central Sports Club, and my wife Grace."

SIMON READY TO SWIM ACROSS THREE ICONIC LAKE DISTRICT LOCATIONS

MEMBER SIMON HARMER IS TAKING the plunge in what will surely be a formidable swimming challenge across three iconic English lakes as he raises money for several charities.

The double leg amputee is set to tackle the Triple Crown which covers Coniston, Windermere and Ullswater in the Lake District over a period of 22 days during June and July.

"Swimming is not only my passion, it is also my refuge. It's where I feel most at ease and capable, regardless of my physical

limitations," said Simon, who will have to swim almost 25 miles to complete the challenge. "Success, for me, lies in completing all three swims. But beyond that, it's about the journey, the lessons learned, the barriers shattered and the lives touched along the way."

The inspirational former Combat Medical Technician will be raising funds for Team True Spirit, a charity that empowers British military veterans, and The Pinder Trust, which helps disabled individuals access water-based activities.



Words: Danny Buckland

↘ BLESMA BRIEFING

Blesma in the healthcare world

BRIAN CHENIER IS THE ASSOCIATION'S PROSTHETICS SUPPORT OFFICER. HE GIVES US AN INSIGHT INTO HIS WORK OVER THE LAST FEW MONTHS



Following a spell as Interim Director of Independence & Wellbeing, I have returned to the role of Prosthetics Support Officer. This round-up of the last few months highlights what this role involves and shows the influence Blesma has on wider healthcare, particularly in the amputee rehabilitation and care space.

DEFENCE MEDICINE AND RECOVERY

At the end of 2023, I was invited to speak at the Combined Services Plastic Surgery Society annual conference about the work Blesma does to support our Members through life. This was an opportunity to learn more about how clinical specialists share knowledge and experience to ensure that they are providing the best care they can for their patients. It was also an opportunity to network and meet many people who, until then, had only existed through email.

In April, I travelled to the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre (DMRC) at Stamford Hall with Blesma's Chief Executive where we met the CO and Complex Trauma personnel. The afternoon included a tour of the facilities and briefings on the role of DMRC, both in times of peace and military operations. A visit to the prosthetics department included a briefing on how prosthetic limbs are made and an insight into some of the ingenious ways prosthetists and technicians try to overcome the challenges faced by artificial limb wearers. Of note were some of the 'outside the box' solutions, such as 3D-printed attachments for allowing upper limb orthotics and prosthetics to hold a fork.

Linked to the visit to DMRC, the Chief Executive and I spent a morning at Queen Elizabeth II Hospital in Birmingham, the home of the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine. We were invited to attend a multi-

disciplinary team meeting which was attended by more than 50 clinical and associated experts (military and civilian) where individual clinical cases were discussed and plans made. The level of detail and care given to each person they were treating or were about to treat was very impressive. Future liaison and links were agreed, and Blesma is seen as an organisation that can add value to the wraparound support that is in place.

NHS AND LIMB SERVICE

I regularly visit Limb Centres, both with Blesma Members and independently, to offer support, advice or training. Visiting with Members is always a priority and being able to help Members communicate effectively with clinical teams is very rewarding. I have continued to provide input and insight into a number of NHS projects, such as the NHS England Prosthetics Service Review. This is now at an advanced stage and is currently seeking stakeholder input into the



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THE LEVEL OF DETAIL AND CARE GIVEN TO EACH PERSON THEY WERE TREATING WAS VERY IMPRESSIVE



proposed new Service Specification. It is likely to then be released for a period of public consultation and we will ensure this is widely communicated to Members.

I continue to represent Blesma on the NHS England Veterans' Prosthetics Panel which decides on applications from eligible veterans for equipment not normally funded by a centre's budget. I am also a Programme Board Member and MDT member with Op RESTORE (formerly the Veterans Trauma Network). Working with BSO Scotland and NI, and BSO Wales and West, we sit on various committees, short-life working groups and established forums to advise, advocate and learn about issues relating to devolved countries of the UK.

VETERANS' MOBILITY FUND AND RESEARCH

The Veterans' Mobility Fund (VMF) is now live and I represent Blesma on the project team as well as being a panel member. I get to see the anonymised applications, which helps me to advise and support BSOs who, in turn, can support Members applying to the fund. Details of the fund, as well as who can apply and how to do that, can be found by searching 'Help for Heroes VMF' or asking your BSO.

I continue to work on various research projects that come into Blesma, often helping to recruit participants or sharing details of interest. As BSO (Prosthetics) I also work more closely on some research projects

Brian spends a great deal of time at Limb Centres to make sure he is aware of all the issues that might affect Members

“
I VISIT LIMB CENTRES WITH OUR MEMBERS AS WELL AS ON MY OWN TO OFFER SUPPORT, ADVICE AND TRAINING

that Blesma is directly linked with, such as the Caring and Coping studies and the Office for Veterans' Affairs-funded Health Innovation Project on Assistive Technology for Mobility Aids.

HORIZON SCANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Part of my role includes attending seminars, conferences and meetings held by the NHS, private provider companies and manufactures. This enables me to have an eye on the future of services and products, and to advise or advocate for Members. In April, I attended the NHS Prosthetic Service Managers planning and engagement event as well as the OpCare annual scientific meeting, where I learned how the company is looking to use new technologies and partnerships to enhance the service it provides.

In May, I attended the OT World International Trade Show and Congress in Leipzig. It attracts hundreds of clinicians and manufacturers in the field of prosthetics and orthotics from all continents. This was a wonderful opportunity to see what is emerging on the market and what advancements are being made. An emphasis on materials and artificial intelligence (or machine learning) was evident.

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



Veterans' Affairs Minister Johnny Mercer with Toby Gutteridge at the VMF launch

VMF is already making a difference after relaunch

The Veterans' Mobility Fund (VMF), which was re-established after a strong lobbying campaign by Blesma alongside Help for Heroes, has already approved £90,000 in grants since its relaunch in March.

The awards panel is processing 114 individual requests from 336 applications for specialist equipment not usually available on the NHS.

So far, successful applications have been for equipment such as power wheelchairs, bespoke wheelchairs and power hoists, with costs ranging from £600 to £20,000.

"It is going well and it is good to see that the applications are coming in and are being processed efficiently," said Brian Chenier, BSO (Prosthetics) and a VMF panel member. "It will make a significant difference to many people.

"Applications are first assessed for eligibility and then move to stage two,

where the level of funding is determined. It is an anonymised process, but the types of application give me reason to believe that many Blesma Members have applied."

The five-year VMF, which is being administered by Blesma and Help for Heroes, covers specialist wheelchairs and mobility scooters, as well as different orthotics such as splints and braces, with applicants being asked to demonstrate integration with wider forms of support addressing needs such as housing, isolation and loneliness or mental wellbeing.

"My advice to any Member who needs equipment and feels they might be eligible is to contact their Support Officer who can guide them on the criteria and the application process," added Brian.

Details about the VMF application process are available at www.helpforheroes.org.uk/get-help/veterans-mobility-fund



CORIE SLIDES A SECOND WORLD CUP TITLE ONTO HIS CV

Blesma Member Corie Mapp has struck gold again with his second para bobsleigh World Cup title, which he can add to two European crowns across an incredible career. The former Household Cavalry Lance Corporal claimed victory in March, six years after lifting his first title.

The triumph comes after the 45 year old embarked on an inspirational sporting journey following a devastating injury caused by an IED blast while he was serving in Afghanistan in 2010. Corie, a double below-knee amputee who is part-sponsored by Blesma, competed in the Warrior and Invictus Games before chasing global glory in para bobsleigh, winning almost 40 medals along the way.

"It feels so incredible to have achieved the success. It's an honour to represent Blesma as well as my countries," said Corie, who was born in Barbados. "It's a beautiful thing to be able to inspire and motivate others. I owe everyone who's



stood by me, but especially the staff members of the Household Cavalry welfare team and the Headley Court staff. They worked extremely hard to nurse me back to health, and I feel as if the sporting success and how I live my life are the biggest 'thank you' I could possibly give them.

"Bobsleigh is a very cerebral sport and consists of an immense amount of mental bandwidth and dexterity," Corie said. "I'd like to thank Blesma for their unwavering support throughout the years, and hopefully I'm making them proud with my actions."



Stu Pearson (right) and his brother Alan

Marathon runners going the extra mile for Blesma

Blesma's road runners went the extra mile in the TCS London Marathon in April, raising vital funds and putting the Association on the map. Among those who took part were former 3 Para Stuart Pearson, who raised more than £3,000, while his brother Alan, who was his support runner, brought in a further £2,000.

Rena Hawkins, whose son Matt Weston was severely injured in Afghanistan, raised £2,335 which will be doubled by her employers, Ramsay Health Care UK. "The marathon was amazing, and although it was my nineteenth I still got a buzz just like it was my first," she said. "The atmosphere was fantastic the whole way around. Blesma has always been at the end of the phone offering help and advice about anything that Matt is having issues with, and I will be eternally grateful for the support that he has had."

James Ritchie's marathon raised an amazing £10,973 and created an inspiring link to his family's military past. The 51 year old ran in honour of his grandfather Eric Baxendale, a former Sergeant in the Leicestershire Regiment who lost his lower

left arm serving in France in WWII before becoming a force in the Croydon Branch.

"It was an honour to do it for my grandfather and raise funds for Blesma," said James. "He never spoke much about the war, but he was determined not to let his injury hold him back. He is long gone now, but I still have fond memories of him and his positive approach to life."

"He kept active all his life and helped a lot of people along the way, so it was good to give back to Blesma, which was obviously an important part of his life."

Businessman Simon Cartwright, who is recovering from extensive injuries from a car accident, tackled the course for Blesma after his consultant, Royal Navy officer Surgeon Commander Jowan Penn-Barwell, recommended the Association. He completed the course in a little over seven hours and raised more than £4,200.

"It was a fantastic experience and the support was wonderful," said Simon. "I wanted to take part in the marathon for charity and Jowan told me about Blesma. It was great to support them and express my gratitude to the team at John Radcliffe Hospital."

News in brief

MEMBER MIKE MAKES GOLFING HISTORY

Mike Browne continues to set the golfing world alight. The former Royal Artillery gunner, now ranked third in the world on the Golf 4 Disabilities (G4D) Tour, made history by winning the first ever G4D PGA tour event in Texas, USA, last year and topped the 2023 DP World G4D Tour.

Mike, who endured more than 30 operations before having an above-knee left leg amputation, only started playing golf in 2014 to recover his social skills but is now a full-time professional.

Mike, whose home club is Long Sutton in Somerset, became the UK's first amputee professional golfer. He is supported by Blesma and sponsored by the On Course Foundation, which specialises in rehabilitation through golf.



A CORRECTION TO THE BLESMA CALENDAR

In the 2024 Blesma calendar for the month of November, the Member was incorrectly named. The name of the Member in the photograph should have been Tom Gower. An apology has been given to Tom's family.

Blesma to partner with The Insurance Surgery

Blesma has announced a corporate partnership with The Insurance Surgery. The company provides life insurance for everyone, but specialises in high-risk customers with pre-existing medical conditions or those in hazardous occupations, as well as people taking part in extreme sports or hobbies.

For every insurance policy taken out, The Insurance Surgery will donate 25% of the value of the insurance policy to Blesma. This contribution is provided by the company and will not result in any additional cost to Members.

Over the next two years, The Insurance Surgery will also be engaging in other fundraising activities and events.

“Our partnership with Blesma, marks a significant milestone for The Insurance Surgery,” said Andy Mellor, the company’s Managing Director. “We are honoured to support the incredible work Blesma does for veterans and the community. By collaborating with such a dedicated charity, we look forward to contributing to the wellbeing and support of those who have sacrificed so much for our country.”

WHAT IS INSURANCE?

Insurance can help you financially, and there are many types to choose from, ranging from travel insurance to life and critical illness insurance. If you have a long-term health condition, such as limb

loss or diabetes, it’s important that you’re upfront about your condition and how it affects you to ensure that you get the right insurance policy. Prices and coverage levels will always vary, so it’s best to request quotes from a few companies to find one that suits your needs and budget.

FINDING INSURANCE THAT’S RIGHT FOR YOU

Blesma has collaborated with The Insurance Surgery to provide you with information about insurance. Although Blesma has a rigorous screening process, we always advise conducting your own research to make an informed decision and be thoroughly aware of any risks before you decide whether to purchase any insurance policy.

For more information on choosing the right insurance, head to the Blesma website at www.blesma.org/insurance

Life Insurance - Partnership.

As a proud partner of Blesma, The Insurance Surgery are experts at finding life insurance for veterans and their families.

Supporting the great work of Blesma.

For every insurance policy taken out, The Insurance Surgery will **donate the equivalent of 25%** of the value of the insurance policy to Blesma.

For example, if the policy is worth £200, The Insurance Surgery will donate £50 to Blesma, The Limbless Veterans. This donation is provided by us and will not result in any additional costs to you.

“Our partnership with Blesma, marks a significant milestone for The Insurance Surgery. We are honoured to support the incredible work Blesma does for veterans and the community. By collaborating with such a dedicated charity, we look forward to contributing to the wellbeing and support of those who have sacrificed so much for our country,”

Andy Mellor, Managing Director of The Insurance Surgery.



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L-R: Craig Howorth, Stephen White and Conrad Thorpe get ready to swim

Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Andy Bate

It's time to take on the Channel. Again!

A group of intrepid Blesma Members are on target to repeat their record-breaking cross-Channel swim to mark the tenth anniversary of their initial achievement.

Conrad Thorpe, Jamie Gillespie, Craig Howorth and Stephen White became the first all-amputee team to swim the 25 miles from England to France when they completed the crossing in 2014.

At the end of May, they completed their mandatory qualifying swim in Dover Harbour to set up a repeat of the challenge, which they will attempt in September.

"It will be almost 10 years to the day when we became the first all-amputee team to swim across the Channel," said Steve White, a former Royal Green Jackets rifleman who is now a Blesma Member and the Association's Vice Chairman.

"We are all in training for what is a formidable challenge for any swimmer. On top of that, of course, we are all 10 years older, but we are more experienced and competent at open water swimming now, and that will help us."

Channel Swimming Association rules require swimmers to complete an observed two-hour swim with no break, in water temperatures below 15.5°C before they are allowed to make a cross-Channel attempt. Jamie completed the qualification on his own a week after the others.

For the swim itself, the team will start near Dover and take an S-shaped route across the Channel to make the best use of the tides, with the aim of getting close to their 12 hour 14 minute time and bettering

the £4,000 they raised for the Association in 2014. They will have to swim in one-hour shifts in strict rotation and must have a team member in the water at all times.

"It will be a great achievement and emotional to do it 10 years on," added Steve, who warmed up for the qualifying session at an ultra swimming event, where he covered 33km through stormy seas off the Croatian coast. "We're doing it to inspire others and to raise funds for Blesma – and that is plenty of motivation!"



They'll be doing it for real in September!



Blesma Vice Chairman Steve White

Activities

FROM KEEPING FIT IN FUERTEVENTURA TO SKIING IN THE USA OR PAYING YOUR RESPECTS ON REMEMBRANCE DAY, WHY NOT DO SOMETHING MEMORABLE WITH BLESMA IN 2024?

Whether it's skiing in Colorado, learning to scuba dive or getting into the Christmas spirit, Blesma is giving Members a chance to experience all kinds of activities this year – and they're all free! There's still time to apply for a range of activities taking place later this year. Have a look at the choices below and apply online at www.blesma.org or by emailing eventsca@blesma.org.

Please be aware that dates are subject to change and that Members will be expected to share a room on each event unless otherwise specified or the Activities Team have been contacted beforehand with viable reasons.

Why not sign up to Blesma's Activities email newsletter to stay up to date with all the upcoming events and date changes? Please email eventsca@blesma.org and ask to be added to the subscription list.

FAMILIES CHRISTMAS EXTRAVAGANZA

Location: Secret Location

Date: December

Application deadline: 01 August

Join us for a mesmerising top-secret Families Christmas Extravaganza when you will have the opportunity to experience the magic of Christmas with your loved ones like never before.

Who can apply?

Any Member with a family of between two and six people (i.e. Member and up to five others).

RIDE TO THE WALL

Location: Burton upon Trent

Date: 04-05 October

Application deadline: 01 July

Join the Blesma crew on this poignant and meaningful motorcycle ride in

memory of the fallen. The ride will finish at the National Memorial Arboretum.

Who can apply?

Any Member with their own motorcycle.

TRY DIVES

Location: Hampshire

Date: 21 September

Application deadline: 01 July

Learn to scuba dive with experienced dive instructors in the complete safety of dive pools whilst working towards your PADI qualifications.

Who can apply?

Any Member, but this will be subject to medical clearance.

SCUBA DIVING

Location: Egypt

Date: 20-27 October

Application deadline: 01 July

A great chance to enjoy some of the world's best diving in warm water. Dive for fun or pick up qualifications. If you've never dived before or need some refresher training, qualified instructors will take you through a weekend training session in the UK prior to the trip. Complete novices are welcome but will have to undertake the mandatory training beforehand.

Who can apply?

Anyone who can move up and down stairs on a dive boat with minimal assistance.

Requirements:

You must be able to enter Egypt and your passport must have at least six months' validity from the date of travel. Divers must complete a Padi Fit to Dive and potentially will require a doctors certificate. You must provide evidence that you have dived in the past 12 months (if you have not dived with Blesma).





Apply online now at blesma.org or by emailing eventsca@blesma.org

Get your fix of winter sports adventures

WINTERSPORTS LA PLAGNE

Location: La Plagne, France

Date: 11-19 January 2025

Application deadline: 15 August

Our fully adaptive ski week returns.

Working with adaptive ski instructors, the event will include sit-ski, stand-up, snowboard and ski biking.



Who can apply?

Everyone, but Members new to skiing or who haven't skied in the past five years must complete our try-out day prior to selection. Carers are not able to ski.

Requirements: You must have at least three months' validity on your passport at the time of travel.



COLORADO SKI SPECTACULAR

Location: Breckenridge, USA

Date: December

Application deadline: 01 August

This annual event run by Disabled Sports USA is one of the world's biggest and best ski spectaculars for all adaptive winter sports. The perfect week to have fun on the slopes. Mono ski, stand-up, snowboarding and 3 track will all be available.

Who can apply?

Most injury types can be catered for on the slopes. However, hotel rooms are not adapted and you must be able to use a bath.

Requirements:

You must be able to enter the USA. Your passport must be valid for the proposed duration of your stay in the USA.

Activities



PHOTOGRAPHY COURSE

Location: London

Date: 07-10 October (TBC)

Application deadline: 01 July

A photography event for all. Spend two days in London photographing the sights, gaining experience and learning tips and tricks from professional photographers.

Who can apply?

Open to beginners and experienced photographers. No photography experience is required and any type of camera can be used – phone, tablet, digital etc

Apply online now at
blesma.org or by emailing
eventscal@blesma.org

FITNESS AND LIFESTYLE COURSE

Location: Fuerteventura, Spain

Date: 15-23 November

Application deadline: 15 July

A chance to reset and look at ways to give your health and wellbeing a boost. Get moving with other Blesma Members and experience the beauty that Spain has to offer whilst trying out a range of new activities. You will also be able to pick up information and techniques to improve your diet and learn tips on how to balance your lifestyle. This week will have a variety of activities including yoga, pilates, cycling, coastering, paddleboarding and golf.

Who can apply?

The week is suitable for any Member.

Requirements:

Your passport must have at least three months' validity during the time of travel.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT FITNESS AND NUTRITION?

The Association is looking at designing a series of fitness and lifestyle courses that will be based around cooking and nutrition, meditation, yoga and flexibility, as well as bespoke training. These courses are intended to run throughout the year. If you would like to register your interest in these fitness and lifestyle courses and stay up to date with future plans, please email eventscal@blesma.org.

Remembrance Weekend

Location: London

Date: 09-10 November

Application deadline: 01 July

Join the annual Remembrance Parade in London. The weekend always marks one of the most poignant events in the calendar. Blesma makes a weekend of the occasion, with a social gathering on the previous evening and a hearty lunch before departure.

Who can apply?

Any Member and their spouse/partner/carer. Members are not expected to share rooms with other Members.



GIVE IT A TRY!

Blesma will be running a series of 'Intro to' activities throughout the year to allow Members to try some of our main calendar events. The dates of these will be published on our mailing lists and in the magazine. Events include, but are not limited to, skiing, horse riding, sailing, golf, diving and cycling. Stay in the loop and register your interest at events@blesma.org.



WOULD YOU LIKE TO PUT ON AN ACTIVITY?

The Activities Team is available to support you in organising an activity and can explain what you'll need to do. First, you will need to complete the Activities Proposal Application Form which is on the website, or you can contact aelocal@blesma.org.

You will be able to discuss the things you'll need to consider about the activity and venue to ensure everything runs smoothly and that Members/Widows are able to enjoy themselves in a safe environment. Is the activity suitable for those with limited mobility? Is the venue accessible and wheelchair friendly? Are there accessible toilets?

Blesma will pay for the cost of hiring the venue, the activity, refreshments and, where appropriate, accommodation. Get in touch with the Activities Team if you would like to learn more.



NEWS ANALYSIS

Trustees' Annual & Strategic Report 2023

EVERY YEAR, THE ASSOCIATION MUST PUBLISH AN ANNUAL REPORT ALONGSIDE A SET OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS. BELOW IS AN ABRIDGED VERSION OF THE MOST RECENT REPORT

Blesma is a specialist Service charity, an Association. Its Members are the war wounded, disabled veterans and their dependants. Blesma shall work tirelessly to meet the challenges of injury, to bring comfort and to help its Members realise their potential.

2023 was anticipated to be a challenging year, as it was the first full year of activities and in-person support following the Covid pandemic. The continued Russian invasion in Ukraine and the Hamas-led attack on Israel in October that led to Israel launching a large-scale invasion of the Gaza Strip as part of the Israel–Hamas War have had significant economic consequences that were made worse by the continued economic upheaval at home.

The cost-of-living crisis and increases in global energy prices had a major effect on household incomes, although there was a slight recovery towards the end of the year. Market uncertainty also impacted on investment performance. The consequences for Blesma were an increase in the need for charitable support for its Members, a more difficult fundraising environment and a loss on the market value of the Association's reserves.

Whilst the Charity made a conscious decision to maintain existing levels of service by drawing on these reserves in 2023, it will continue to closely scrutinise and prioritise its spending to meet its commitment to provide lifelong support.

Throughout the year, our Blesma Support Officers, Outreach Officers and volunteers maintained close contact with our Members, visiting in person and increasing the number and scope of regional and online outreach events that kept Members in touch with each other.

By using the experiences and lessons learned from the Covid era, our teams have reinforced the success of a mix of in-person and online activities to reach a wider cross-section of Members. This has also been enabled by development of our digital communications platforms and systems.

With a full activities programme at home and overseas, Members have participated in skiing trips, golf, sailing and cycling events, and fitness and lifestyle courses. Closer to home, others took part in family glamping events, Widows and Seniors Weeks, and a wide range of group activities across the UK. Other Members were supported in their own personal challenges, which included mountaineering, motorsports, diving, bodybuilding, endurance events and competitive sport.

The Making Generation R programme ended in June 2023 and was replaced by a new Storytelling and Wellbeing programme delivered by our partner, The Drive Project. The uptake of the new programme has been very successful, with a wide range of Members signing up. It also brings Blesma Members who were injured in Afghanistan together

with injured Ukrainian soldiers to share their experiences (see more on p40).

During 2023, we welcomed 217 new Members into the Association, providing them with advice, assistance and the friendship and support of others familiar with the experience of limb loss. Sadly, we also learned of the loss of 155 Blesma Members, Widows and Widowers over the year. Our sympathies go out to their families and friends.

This annual report summarises Blesma's objectives and activities, and its financial position for 2023. Financial results and considerations have been reflected in the Financial Review and Independent Auditor's Report.

The Association remains steadfast in its determination to be there for its Members, through life.

Security

Throughout 2023, Blesma's Support and Outreach Officers, supported by specialist Head Office staff, have continued to deliver advice, assistance and welfare support to our Members in the UK and abroad. In addition, our 80 active volunteers selflessly supported Blesma in a variety of ways, from befriending calls to transporting mobility aids from region to region or Member to Member.

2023 saw the return of a more traditional model of welfare delivery, supplemented

Maurillia Simpson attended her first Members' Weekend in 2023. "I felt part of a big family I didn't even know I had!"



Newsfeed



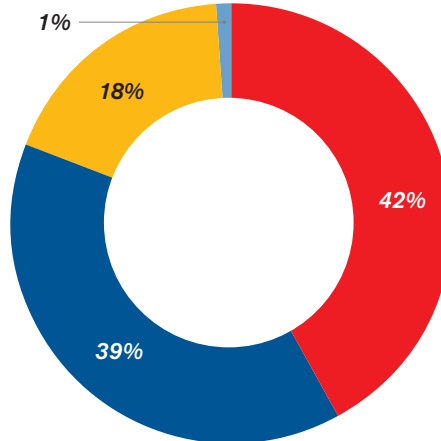
by online and telephone services being provided by Support Officers, Outreach Officers, and Branch and regional volunteers. In total, there were 14,170 contacts with our Members during 2023, of which 677 were home visits and 30 were online consultations. Our work to counter digital isolation continued throughout 2023, with Members engaging online with family, friends and other Members across the country and overseas.

In total, Blesma awarded 1,397 welfare grants to 1,141 Members in 2023, providing support across a range of needs including powered and manual wheelchairs, mobility scooters, stairlifts, disabled bicycles, and white and brown goods (essential household items). We also assisted with adaptations to bathrooms and kitchens, and access to homes, car ports and gardens. Members were also provided with equipment and training for employment.

Feedback from Blesma's Support Officers indicated that casework during 2023 continued to follow a similar theme to 2022 by becoming more complex, professionally demanding and time intensive, with some evidence that statutory services were struggling to meet the financial obligations to provide works or services. This was largely attributed to the impact of the Covid legacy and financial pressures on statutory service delivery, particularly where support to Members required a multi-agency intervention. Where this was evident, Support Officers continued to coordinate with other providers in multi-disciplinary teams to ensure Members received the joined-up support they needed.

Delivery of in-person prosthetics support

INCOME



■ Donations & Grants	42%
■ Legacy	39%
■ Investment Income	18%
■ Other Income	1%

“In total, there were 14,170 contacts with Members during 2023, of which 677 were home visits and 30 online consultations”

by all NHS Limb Centres continued in 2023. Staff levels remain a concern in some areas. Most Limb Centres in England now manufacture new sockets off site using a central fabrication approach which, on occasions, led to additional delays, particularly when problems with sockets were identified at the fit and delivery stage.

In 2023, we continued to monitor developments in prosthetic provision to our Members across the UK. At an individual level, Blesma advocated directly for Members who required support locally at their NHS Limb Centres. We continued to raise awareness of living with physical disability through regional GP veterans awareness training sessions over the year.

The Complex Prosthetics Assessment Clinic received 11 referrals for provision of prosthetic sockets. The Veterans Trauma Network was renamed Op RESTORE and Blesma attended the official launch as a key partner in the network. Blesma was represented on the Op RESTORE programme board and was actively involved in 22 multi-disciplinary teams meetings which directly benefited our Members. In 2023, Op RESTORE received 358 referrals into the service.

Blesma continued to maintain close links with the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre at Stanford Hall, enjoying good working relationships with both the clinical staff and the Veterans Welfare Service. Blesma's support recovered to pre-Covid levels with regular visits to Stanford Hall by BSO Midlands.

For those with Service-attributable amputations, the Veterans' Prosthetics Panel (VPP) continued to provide an



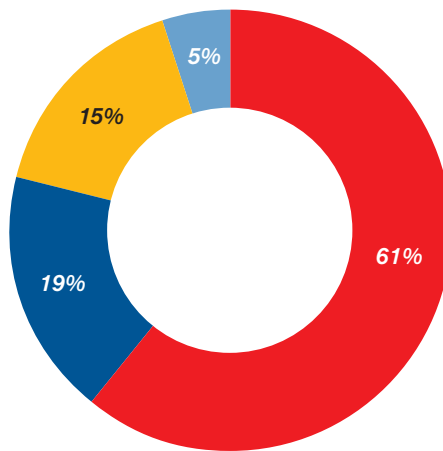
excellent route for funding components in England. In 2023, the VPP authorised 376 successful advanced prosthetic component applications for veterans, valued at £2,111,591. Eligible Members living in the devolved administrations had similar access to enhanced prosthetics through national care pathways, again supported by Blesma.

The Association’s BSO (Prosthetics) continues as a member of the NHS England Prosthetics Service Review board, which is at the stage of designing and drafting an NHS-wide service specification which will be publicised and subjected to public consultation in due course.

Blesma was also represented on the Direct Skeletal Fixation (osseointegration) Policy Working Group, which submitted a policy draft and evidence review to NHS England for consideration of further surgical intervention for prosthetic users who have a low tolerance of conventional prosthetic sockets. Despite a successful completion of outstanding osseointegration surgeries, NHS England was unable to commission this intervention during the funding round for 2023/24 due to other funding priorities.

THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF PATTENMAKERS

In 2023, Blesma was pleased to remain engaged with the Worshipful Company of Pattenmakers, and was particularly delighted that through their generous donation, we were able to assist another Member to have a pair of bespoke leather shoes made by Bill Bird Shoes, which supported the use of orthotics to aid mobility. The Member was proud to wear

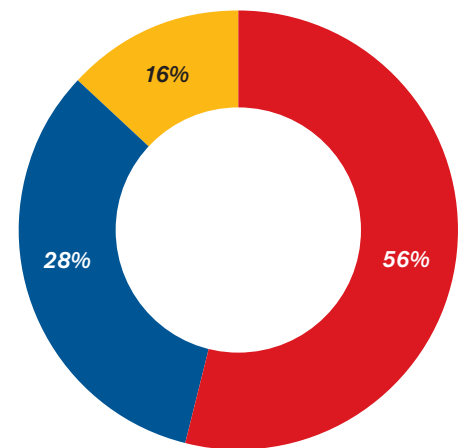


EXPENDITURE

Membership Services	61%
Fundraising and Investment Management Fees	19%
Activities	15%
Awareness & Representation	5%

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES EXPENDITURE

Advice, Support, Visits	56%
Engagement, Other	28%
Grants	28%
Overheads	16%



the shoes at the National Remembrance Parade at The Cenotaph in London in November. We look forward to further engagement and support in 2024. Blesma’s membership enquiries and

application process continued to benefit from the move to an online process in 2023, with 217 new Members joining the Association during the year. Some applications were received from veterans

Newsfeed



whilst still recovering in hospital, helping to reduce anxiety and stress about what will happen next for them.

Blesma's Benefits and Social Care Adviser successfully resolved 63 benefit enquiries submitted via BSOs and a further 31 directly from Members. She also conducted at-home consultations with BSOs to advise and support Members with particularly complex cases as well as video message consultations.

Blesma continued to engage with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and its providers to ensure the Association kept staff and Members up to date with legislation and processes. BSOs also continued to directly support individual Members who wished to challenge their War Pensions, Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Awards or DWP benefits. This included representing them at 10 hearings or tribunals. Blesma continued to engage with the DWP and delivery partners, highlighting issues affecting veterans. This included monitoring and publishing changes to policy which may affect Members.

WORK WITH DEVOLVED GOVERNMENTS

Blesma continued to work with Social Security Scotland to help shape its new disability benefit system, specifically where it has impact on veterans. The Adult Disability Payment is the Scottish equivalent to the Personal Independence

Payment. In Wales, Blesma continued to attend the Cross-Party Group for Armed Forces and Cadets and also the Expert Group on the Needs of the Armed Forces Community in Wales. We also maintained a strong relationship with the Welsh Government Armed Forces Team. The Association continued to highlight gaps in support for veterans and their families in Wales while supporting initiatives to improve service provision, reduce social isolation for veterans and improve prosthetics provision. BSO (Wales and West) collaborated directly with the new Veterans' Commissioner for Wales and now sits as Vice Chair of the Wales Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee (VAPC).

In Northern Ireland, the Association worked closely with the NI Veterans Support Office (NIVSO) to coordinate support and raise awareness of veterans' issues. Blesma also contributed to the success of six veterans information roadshows hosted by the Veterans' Commissioner. BSO (Prosthetics) and BSO Scotland & Northern Ireland are members of the NI Armed Forces Liaison Forum and work with the Musgrave Park Limb Centre on issues affecting prosthetic provision in the Province.

Identity

A varied programme of international activities took place throughout the year. These included skiing in France, winter sports in Colorado, golf in Portugal and sailing in Greece. There was also an excellent programme of national activities





for Members ranging from family glamping to gaming. The programme was also used to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant Funded Afghanistan Veterans' Fund project that focused on those injured in recent conflicts, which included a trip to a safari park.

Blesma was awarded funding, again by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust, to deliver a Women's Veterans Fund programme. Meetings with female Members took place and a programme has been designed for 2024. After the decision to bring Making Generation R to a close in 2022 the programme finally ended in June 2023 with a closing celebration in the Midlands Arts Centre bringing Member participants together from throughout the programme.

Making Generation R was succeeded by a Storytelling and Wellbeing programme, delivered by The Drive Project. The uptake of the programme has been very successful, 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 experiences.

Members' Weekend once again took place at Chesford Grange in Warwickshire and included an in-person Annual General Meeting. The weekend also offered a Remembrance Service and a range of activities on the Sunday, along with evening meals and plenty of opportunities to meet old friends and make new ones.

The Remembrance Parade at The Cenotaph took place in November and included a range of Members and the Chief Executive. The Venture Fund continued to support Members taking part in personal sporting challenges and endeavours, as well as those following sporting pathways including the Paralympics. Members who were supported by the Venture Fund accomplished some amazing feats including climbing Everest, motorsports, diving, bodybuilding and representing the country in a number of competitions.

Coordination of the delivery of the Office of Veterans' Affairs Health Innovation Fund project on assistive technology was carried out with our research partner Anglia Ruskin University and was due to end in early 2024.

“We welcomed 217 new Members, providing them with advice, assistance and the friendship and support of others”

Connectivity

Four issues of *Blesma Magazine* were produced throughout the year focusing on Member stories and updates about the Association. Highlights included marking the 20th anniversary of the Second Iraq War with stories of Members injured in the conflict, Hari Budha Magar's record-breaking ascent of Everest, and the successful bid and official launch of the Veterans' Mobility Fund.

The Blesma website started undergoing a significant upgrade to its engine and online performance, with the work scheduled to end in spring 2024. Website traffic hit its highest-ever level during the year. Blesma continued its strong presence across social media, with particular growth on LinkedIn. Stories included the 20th anniversary of the Second Iraq War and Members supported through the Venture Fund programme.

Press coverage continued to be secured for the Association, with Hari Budha Magar's successful Everest climb in particular boosting Blesma in the news, including on the BBC.

There was close cooperation between Blesma, Help for Heroes and the Office for Veterans' Affairs concerning the award of the Veterans' Mobility Fund to Help for Heroes in partnership with Blesma. An official announcement took place at the Union Jack Club in October with the Minister for Veterans' Affairs Rt Hon Johnny Mercer MP in attendance.

This is taken from the Trustees' Annual and Strategic Report 2023. You can read the full report and financial statements at www.blesma.org/news-media/annual-report

NOTHING VENTURED NOTHING GAINED

SCOTT McNEICE HAD NEVER STOOD ON A SNOWBOARD UNTIL 2019. HE HAS NOW BEEN GIVEN A BLESMA VENTURE FUND GRANT TO HELP HIM CHASE HIS PARALYMPIC DREAM

Scott McNeice joined the Army in 2003 and served in the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps. He completed tours of Iraq and Afghanistan, but a worsening knee injury eventually led to an above-knee amputation in 2017. Not one to sit still, Scott competed at the Invictus Games just a year later and discovered snowsports after that. Now, he's hoping to qualify to compete for Team GB in snowboarding at the 2026 Winter Paralympic Games.

Tell us how you got into the military...

I grew up in Chesterfield, and at a young age decided I wanted to join the Army – I think I was about six! I worked in care homes and hospitals for people struggling with mental illness for a while before I joined up at the age of 18. I liked the idea of being a medic – it seemed the best of both worlds. After training, I went straight into working at an MoD hospital, and within a few months I was on operations

in Iraq. It was everything I had expected – a complete whirlwind! I remember really wanting to go but also thinking: 'What have I let myself in for?' There was always a lot going on as a medic, and I also did some top cover. I had my 21st birthday out there with a different kind of fireworks – incoming mortars!

What led to you having an amputation?

I initially injured my knee in Afghanistan in 2011. Later, I was working at Headley Court, training with a Bergen to get ready to go back out on operations. One day, I came out of the gates of Headley on a run and turned a corner, but my foot stayed where it was – I had torn my meniscus. I was only able to stay in the Army by the skin of my teeth, but I kept having knee trouble. 2014 was bad, I injured it twice. Then, in 2016, I was sent to an armoured medical regiment and put on a hellish PT session, and I destroyed my knee again.

And it just kept getting worse?

Yes. There was no meniscus layer inside the medial aspect of my knee. The joint was rubbing bone on bone. I had to use



Words: Nick Moore Photography: Rob Whitrow



“AS OF THIS SEASON I’M
EXACTLY WHERE I NEED TO
BE. NOW, IT’S JUST A CASE OF
PUTTING IN THE HARD WORK”



crutches and was in a lot of pain. I was given a High Tibial Osteotomy operation during which your tibia is broken and a metal wedge inserted to change the angle of your knee and reduce some pressure. Unfortunately, just 24 hours after that, I developed acute Compartment Syndrome. My nerve endings, blood vessels and muscles were crushed. It was so painful.

And so that eventually pushed you towards amputation?

It did. In 2017 alone I had 12 or 13 operations. The metal wedge got infected, and at one point you could actually see the metalwork in my leg! It was taken out and I underwent radical surgery, but that was excruciating. I developed Complex Regional Pain Syndrome – your nerves don't reconnect properly and I was passing out when my dressings were being changed! I threatened to take the leg off myself with a circular saw, and by that November there was a consensus that it had to come off.

Did your work at Headley Court help you prepare mentally for the amputation?

I suppose it did in some ways. I knew the process and understood about amputation. I just wanted to be rid of the pain. I knew that prosthetics and wheelchairs were coming, but I was also very aware that I would be able to move forward with my life afterwards. I knew the protocol so was probably more prepared than most.

Tell us how sport came to play a big part in your recovery...

A week before my amputation in 2017, the Invictus Games took place in Canada. I was watching the athletes, knowing that my leg soon wasn't going to be there. I remember thinking to myself: 'This is the goal.' The next Games would take place in Sydney in 2018. I had that in my head. My leg came off and there was an Invictus intro day a week later. It gave me a focus straight away. The team at Headley didn't want me to do it – they said it was too soon – but I needed a focus.

And you made the team...

I ended up competing in six sports in Sydney. It was still early days for me, so I mainly competed in wheelchair-based sports. I only get a microprocessor knee a few weeks before I flew out. Sydney was great, but after a big event like that a lot of people have a downer. That happened to me; I was left wondering what I was going to do next, but then snowsports came along. The Armed Forces Para-Snowsport Team had an open day, and they took me under their wing.

Were you a skier or snowboarder before your amputation?

I'd never been on snow before – or even on a skateboard or roller skates! I turned up at Snozone Yorkshire and met a couple of instructors. I asked them what the hardest thing would be for me to learn. They told me sit ski would be the easiest and snowboarding the toughest. At the time, I was of the mindset that I wanted to prove everyone wrong, so I went for the



Scott training at the Snozone Yorkshire

Thanks to Snozone Yorkshire

snowboard. I'd only been walking for a couple of weeks so had little control, and my prosthetic wasn't right for it. I ended up with horrendous bruising, but despite all that I got the adrenaline rush I'd been craving. I was desperate to try it again.

But you improved quickly...

It started to take off for me in 2019. I got an International Paralympic Committee (IPC) classification in banked slalom snowboarding. I still wasn't great but was thrown straight onto a World Cup course. I wondered what on earth I was doing, but I got down it. After that, I went to train in Colorado, where Team GB had a look at me and thought I was progressing well.

And you have recently been awarded a Blesma Venture Fund grant to support you on your Paralympic pathway...

That has helped massively. This is my first season with the Great Britain development squad, and I've been travelling a lot to and from training camps. Each trip can cost around £1,000, and without any financial support it would be really tricky to afford. Knowing that some of the costs have been covered by the Association makes it much more manageable. My sole aim now is to qualify for the 2026 Winter Paralympics.

What do you need to do to get there?

I've done the Europa Cup for banked slalom and SBX [snowboard cross]. I need

to get enough points to get into the World Cup. If I can do that, I'll be eligible for the Paralympics. That's the aim. As of this season, I'm exactly where I need to be. I've improved massively. Now, it's just a case of putting in the hard work.

What would it mean to get to the Paralympics?

So much. I'd be putting on a uniform again, representing my country. It's not about medals right now. At the moment, with the development squad, I feel like I've been given the kit, but I've not got the right to wear it yet. If I make the Paralympic team, and that kit is on the washing line for the first time, I'll have made it. I'm in a good place. I have a purpose, I know what I need to do to get to where I want to go. It will be hard work, but it is achievable. You don't get anything out if you don't put the hard work in!

“I KNEW THAT PROSTHETICS AND WHEELCHAIRS WERE COMING, BUT I WAS ALSO AWARE I WOULD BE ABLE TO MOVE FORWARD WITH MY LIFE”

Scott is photographed at Snozone Yorkshire. For more visit www.snozoneuk.com/yorkshire

“THE SCAR IS THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG. TO ASSIST THE HEALING PROCESS I’M LOOKING AT WHAT’S GOING ON UNDER THE SURFACE”



Caitlin is currently writing a book with a focus on both the practical and mental health aspects of amputation

“I’M LOOKING AT WHAT’S GOING ON UNDER THE SURFACE”

Caitlin McNeice is a remedial, sports and scar massage therapist with a masters in amputation rehabilitation. She explains the latest thinking behind the relatively new field of scar tissue massage

There can’t be many people in the UK who know more about veterans’ rehabilitation than Caitlin McNeice. Not only is she a qualified remedial, sports and scar massage therapist with a masters degree in amputation rehabilitation, but her partner of nearly 10 years, Scott McNeice, is a military amputee and Blesma Member [see p28 for more].

“I’m a sporty person and knew I wanted to work with people, so after university I began working in a sports and remedial massage clinic,” says Caitlin. “I was also lucky enough to work at the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, where I was attached to the military flag team for the medal ceremonies. I was so impressed with those guys that I joined the Reserves.

“I met Scott when he was based in Stirling. He was into archery and had a shoulder injury. I knew I could help people with injuries like his, and being a Reservist gave me that added military perspective.”

A DIFFERENT DIRECTION

Partly because of her burgeoning career and partly due to logistics when Scott began struggling with his knee, Caitlin didn’t join the military full-time.

“Our relationship was still quite new when Scott went into hospital,” she says. “Much of my work was still in Scotland, so we scraped by for a while. Logistics were a nightmare, and there was a lot of driving. Scott got a serious infection and at one point I found him sitting on the sofa, shaking because he was so ill. So my military career never quite got going. It just didn’t fit with my life.”

Caitlin’s experiences looking after Scott led her to find out more about amputation and scars. In 2018, as part of a scar course, she learned how massage can help to heal damaged tissue, and she has since worked with a number of Invictus Games athletes.

“When you lay down scar tissue, it wants to knit the area back together as quickly as possible, and the fibres are much thicker and stiffer. Scar massage is still a relatively new approach, but it is about understanding those different structures. We are learning more about how the connective tissue that covers your whole body – the fascia – mixes with scars and muscle.

“With massage, you can change the appearance of the scar tissue, especially in scars that are less than two years old, but the scar itself will only regain up to 80% of its original function. The scar is the tip of the iceberg – the small area that’s visible on the surface. To assist the healing process I’m looking at what’s going on under the surface; where is there tension, heat, a lack of tissue...”

Caitlin followed the scar course with a masters degree in amputation rehabilitation.

“After Scott competed in the Invictus Games in 2018, I struggled a lot with anxiety. Doing the degree helped me

come to terms with things. It had been such a journey with Scott, and then we had to find out all about prosthetics. Between us we have a lot of practical, real-world knowledge and medical understanding.

“I completed the degree part time and wrote my dissertation on the experiences of snowsports veterans; how did the activity change or improve their lives? It was very interesting.”

HELPING HEALING HANDS

Caitlin has also worked with veterans in Bosnia through a charity called the Healing Hands Network, which has been sending massage therapists out to the Balkans for the last three decades.

“I went out there for a couple of weeks and worked with a mix of people,” says Caitlin. “The benefit of having someone who cares can really make a difference. I worked with a guy who had been shot in the chest. Afterwards, he said he felt as though he could stand up tall again. I also worked with a woman who had been shot in the head and arm when she was six years old. And there were older clients who didn’t have physical issues but had a lot of emotional trauma.”

On top of all this, Caitlin is writing a book. “It’s a kind of field guide to amputation, with a focus on the practical and mental health elements; things that have helped Scott and myself, and that you or your partner can do. And we are chatting to Blesma to see if we can work together to provide therapy for Members who are struggling with pain.

“The Association has been great for us. It was the first charity to get in touch with Scott and ask if he would like to chat. It has been there the whole way.”



For more on how Caitlin might be able to help, email stokestherapy1@gmail.com



WHY WALES IS LEADING THE WAY

COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE WELSH GOVERNMENT, WELSH HEALTH, LIMB CENTRE LEADS AND BLESMA IS PAYING DIVIDENDS WHEN IT COMES TO OFFERING IMPROVED SERVICES TO INJURED MILITARY PERSONNEL





Limb Centres are constantly improving the range and quality of the support they can offer

Health services around the UK are strained, but the provision of prosthetics across Wales is highlighting how collaboration and cohesion can create high quality services. In Wales, prosthetics services operate from three Limb Centres – Cardiff, Swansea and Wrexham. The Cardiff and Swansea centres, in particular, are unique services within their hospital areas, and with staff being mainly full time, are shining examples of what can be achieved with a combination of multi-disciplinary expertise of clinical staff, including physiotherapy, psychology, occupational health and prosthetics. This includes the behind-the-scenes workhorses; the technicians.

These crucial multi-disciplinary teams and centres work precisely because of the unique environments and exclusive expertise given to amputees and those with amputation-based conditions. Being based within a small environment of readily available and dedicated professionals, they have the space and time to treat our traumatically injured veterans.

“This is a perfect example of how partnerships can work with a foundation of flexibility and transparency,” says

Wales and West Support Officer Tom Hall, who works with Outreach Officer Jason Suller to respond to a wide range of Member needs, managing their expectations effectively when required.

“Our aim is to get the best provision for our Members, and everyone involved is on board with that. There is a difference in what is available depending on whether the injury is Service-attributable or not, but all Members get excellent provision that is tailored to their needs.

“This is based on the current Welsh Health prosthetics policies which cater to war veterans and the general amputee population through the respective Prosthetic and Amputee Rehabilitation Service policies. Blesma adds its voice to the formulation of these policies, which are constantly being improved by the NHS service in Wales.”

Members with Service-attributable injuries benefit from the latest technology and advances, but their feedback on new equipment is critical to improving the range and quality of help that is available to the rest of the amputee community. Limb Centres are constantly improving their offer to the public and can now provide psychological support thanks, in large part, to the need being identified by some Blesma Members.

“It is a constantly evolving environment and Members do play a big and positive

role in shaping the service for themselves, for fellow Members and for the public,” adds Tom, who currently supports 310 Members in his region.

Member Steve Fisher was injured in The Falklands War and had his right leg amputated below the knee as a result. He attends the Swansea Limb Centre.

“The fantastic thing is that all the experts I need to see are all in the same place,” says Steve. “I’ve got access to a prosthetist, physiotherapist, psychologist, in-house doctor and nurses. And I am supported by the office staff who are all very caring and helpful. They are like a family and I call them my A-Team!

“When I go in, I’m able to get help from anyone and that makes it a lot easier to get the help I need quickly. I’ve recently been helped by the psychologist after I fell into a deep depression, and I’ve had an operation for a neuroma and was given pads and cream when my stump became inflamed.”

ADDRESSING AREAS OF CONCERN

The Welsh Government has carried out a series of exercises to better understand the physical and psychological pressures on military veterans and is exploring measures to support veterans in the community and tackle loneliness and isolation; key areas of concern that have already been identified – and continue to be addressed – by the Association.

Meanwhile, a government representative attends the quarterly forum meetings alongside Blesma and senior Limb Centre staff to work through issues in the service, with Member feedback being a powerful element in shaping provision.

“I am extremely proud of the excellent partnership work in Wales to support our Forces community,” says Eluned Morgan, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care. “As in so many areas, this approach has delivered real outcomes for veterans. We have an amazing team of allied health professionals and others in our ALAS services which is delivering excellent service and improved outcomes for those who need them. We value our positive relationship with Blesma, who are a part of our Armed Forces Expert group, and we will continue to work with Tom Hall to listen to veterans across Wales who access high-quality prosthetics services.”

Limb Centres are bustling hospital environments with industrious behind-



"The staff are very friendly and knowledgeable," says Philip Watchorn



Tom Hall, Blesma Support Officer for Wales and West



Ian Massey (right), Cardiff
clinical lead prosthetist



Prosthetist Pam Jenkin
spends time talking with
Member Philip Watchorn

“THE FEEDBACK FROM MILITARY VETERANS IS ESSENTIAL TO OUR DELIVERY. THEY HAVE THAT CERTAIN MINDSET”

the-scenes units of highly skilled prosthetists and technicians keeping pace with advancing technology and techniques.

Ian Massey, clinical lead prosthetist at the Cardiff Limb Centre, joined the industry in 1975 and has seen significant advances in the technology available and the attitude to veterans over his career.

“We now have some fantastic technology and techniques that we can use, and the Military Covenant changed veterans’ policy for the better so that they could access the best components,” he says. “The result has been that a lot of people are more mobile for a lot longer and, because of the trailblazing work of veterans who were the first to try out microprocessor knees, we now offer them to non-Service attributable veterans and the public.

“We have the components and the skills to tailor everything to our patients, who range from WWII veterans to those injured in more recent conflicts. We are fortunate that we have good relations with our commissioners, who fund the service, the Welsh Government and Blesma, which helps the service run smoothly.

“The feedback from military veterans is essential to our delivery as a lot have that certain mindset of driving through barriers and attaining goals. They are very active and push the prosthetics to their limits, which helps us understand more and develop an even better service.”

Peter McCarthy, clinical lead prosthetist at Swansea Limb Centre, echoes this view:

“Blesma Members play a vital role in testing out new equipment and technology which then feeds into the general patient population maybe five years later,” he says. “Their feedback leads to improvements that everyone benefits from, and it is a role that they are keen to fulfil. One such



Grant Jenkins is cast for a new socket by Cardiff Limb Centre prosthetist Heather Bassett

benefit is the provision of psychological support, which was a clear need for some Service-attributable veterans and is now available to all through a psychologist based at the department.”

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

Member Grant Jenkins, a Royal Artillery veteran, pushes himself and his prosthetic to the limits. The 56 year old, who needed a right leg below-knee amputation after a car accident in 2007, has been attending the Cardiff Limb Centre to have a cast for a new fitting following stump revision surgery. Fitness has been his salvation since fighting depression and weight gain as he endured 15 operations.

“It is great to have this service and to be able to pursue my fitness,” he says. “I like routine, which the training gives me. It has been really tough to have to put that on hold for the stump revision, but that was needed and I’m looking forward to getting back to cycling and training.”

Philip Watchorn, a 74-year-old former Royal Lancers Signaller who was struck by a car while on a night exercise in Osnabruck, Germany at the start of his Army career, has volunteered for Blesma since leaving the Forces: “It is easy to visit the centre and the staff are very friendly, knowledgeable and professional,” he says. “The centre is always there for me and Blesma has always been there for me.”

The previous Minister responsible for veterans in Wales, Hannah Blythyn MS, visited the Limb Centre in Wrexham, and the new Veterans’ Commissioner in Wales, James Phillips, has visited the Swansea Limb Centre with Blesma. He also attends the Prosthetics Forum to listen to views and to offer his own expertise at making a difference for veterans.

Elsewhere, Blesma has also helped to forge collaboration between Wales and England, including with the Salisbury Hospital War Injuries Clinic. This has enhanced the options available to those Service-attributable Members in Wales who sometimes need cross-over care.

“The collaboration between Welsh Government, Welsh Health, the Limb Centre leads and Blesma has been a game-changer in not only ensuring that Members receive the best and most appropriate provision, but also to ensure that any gaps in service are identified quickly and that the communication is carried out in the right way,” says Tom. “A professional, transparent and trusting relationship has been established in Wales, and this can only be positive for our Members and their families in the future.”

If you would like to talk about any matters concerning your Limb Centre, please speak to your Support or Outreach Officer. All contact details can be found on p68



“We are comrades and brothers in arms,” Darren Swift (centre) told injured Ukrainian soldiers

SHARING 90 YEARS OF KNOWLEDGE

BLESMA MEMBERS ARE HELPING UKRAINE'S INJURED SERVICE PERSONNEL START TO COME TO TERMS WITH LIVING WITH LIMB LOSS. IN APRIL, *BLESMA MAGAZINE* WENT ALONG TO THE GROUNDBREAKING NEW PROJECT'S FIRST FACE-TO-FACE MEETING IN LONDON

Ukrainian charities have thanked Blesma for providing a huge boost to their morale and knowledge after taking part in a groundbreaking collaborative project.

The innovative idea, called *Conversations: Розмови* has paired Blesma Members with Ukrainian soldiers who are coming to terms with life after sustaining serious battlefield injuries. The opportunity for them to share their experiences and gain confidence to live independent and fulfilling lives has been hailed around the world for its impact on the beleaguered nation, which has recorded some 60,000 civilian and military amputees since the Russian invasion two years ago.

The project has featured a series of online and in-person sessions with Blesma Members Mark Ormrod, Stephan van Niekerk, Darren Swift, Hari Budha Magar, Wali Noori, Colin Branch and

Stu Pearson. In April, they were joined by six members of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, including two who were about to take part in the TCS London Marathon.

"I'd like to express my personal gratitude for your help in organising the meeting of our veterans in London," wrote Olena Schmidt, President of the Citizen Charity Foundation, which campaigns to secure equipment and expertise for Ukrainian amputees and to raise awareness of the

country's continuing struggle. "From the team at the foundation, I am sending a letter of thanks to the entire Blesma team."

She added that the collaboration, which has been facilitated by The Drive Project, has supported the Ukrainian soldiers involved and generated vital knowledge and understanding that will be shared with other injured military veterans.

The project was launched last November with an online link-up and was followed up with this in-person session before the London Marathon. Both sessions gave Ukrainian amputees vital insight into how to cope, both physically and psychologically, with limb loss.

"When Blesma asked us to design a project that used the experiences and stories of its Members to support Ukrainians, we spent a long time considering what would be most useful for everyone involved," says Grace Staniland, director of The Drive Project. "We wanted to keep it simple but make it impactful,





Blesma's psychological support and knowledge sharing has proved to be invaluable



Above: Stu Pearson spends time with an Ukrainian soldier in central London



“FOR THE CONVERSATIONS PROJECT, WE NEEDED TO ENSURE THAT WE CREATED A SPACE IN WHICH EVERYONE’S STORY WAS EQUAL”

bearing in mind the need for translators. Having worked with Blesma Members for a number of years we know how inspiring their stories are. For the project, we needed to ensure that we created a space in which everyone’s story was equal.

“The Ukrainians are living through a live conflict and as a result their recovery journeys are very different from Blesma Members’ experiences. The aim of the project was for everybody to learn from one another whilst acknowledging and appreciating that these experiences would be different. During the online and in-

person workshops, we set up exercises and facilitated conversations for everyone to share what they hoped would be useful; from personal stories to small, manageable life tools that could be useful in everyday life. These were supportive spaces where everyone was open to listening, being curious and humble, and learning.”

When the veterans met face to face at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane in London, they were able to discuss their military and personal experiences.

“It is a very worthwhile project to be involved in and I can only see it growing.

It gives us a great sense of worth,” Blesma Member Darren Swift told the group on the day. “We are all amputees and we share a lot of similarities, but there are some stark differences. You guys have become injured and your country is still in conflict, whereas we were very fortunate that we went away to conflict and came back to relatively peaceful countries.

“We see you guys as being very courageous. We are definitely starting a relationship and we are comrades, brothers in arms. Long may this continue.”

FORMING VITAL CONNECTIONS

Ukrainian Marines Oleksii and Heorhii, who were both seriously wounded fighting against Russian invasion forces, said the connection was vital to their rehabilitation process, and that the knowledge and advice from Blesma Members would radiate around Ukraine’s amputee community.

“Whilst we couldn’t represent everyone’s stories from either the UK or Ukraine, every story has value,” says Grace.

“This project is about sharing lived experiences to raise awareness of living with limb loss and disability, and to share ideas on how to motivate oneself to get back to life. Hopefully, this is just the very first chapter in the story of shared experiences from Blesma Members and their Ukrainian friends.”

Tony Bloomfield, Blesma’s Operations Director, adds: “The project has been a considerable success, and it has been a humbling experience to witness the participants’ journeys. The number of Ukrainian people to have lost limbs since the Russian invasion is around 60,000, and to make a comparison Blesma has helped around 65,000 Members throughout its 90-year history.

“Ukraine is facing a monumental challenge that will resonate through the nation for years and generations to come. We’ve been able to offer psychological support and are helping with resources. Our Members have already experienced what these people are going through and, in typical Blesma style, have been delighted to help.”

If you are a Blesma Member and would like to find out more about how you can get involved in the programme going forward, please send an email to info@blesma.org to register your interest





I am not a badge of honour,
I am not a social smooch,
I am not a fashion statement,
To be worn but once a year,

I am not glorification
Of conflict or of war,
I am not a paper ornament
A token, I am more,

I am a loving memory,
Of a father or a son,
A permanent reminder
Of each and every one,

I'm paper on enamel
I'm old on shining new,
I'm a way of saying thank you,
To every one of you,

I am a simple poppy
A Reminder to you all,
That courage faith and honour,
Will stand where heroes fall.

By Paul Hindes BCLA

Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Lucy Knott



“ THIS IS HOME FOR ME ”

SCOTTISH CHARITY ERSKINE BEGAN LIFE AS A HOSPITAL FOR LIMBLESS VETERANS. TODAY, ITS PURPOSE-BUILT CAMPUS OFFERS A CARE HOME, ASSISTED AND INDEPENDENT LIVING

For much of the early twentieth century, the cacophony from the thundering hammers and clanking rivets would drift along the River Clyde to heather-clad Kilpatrick Hills, where a much quieter revolution was taking place. The industrial inferno of the shipyards was producing one fifth of the world's vessels and assembling the lion's share of Britain's naval fleet during the tumultuous days of WWI. Six miles downriver, similar skills were being used to help wounded soldiers who were coming home from the battlefields of Europe.

The harrowing sight of men returning with amputations and PTSD shocked the entire nation. In the west of Scotland, the response was to create a pioneering hospital for limbless veterans. Erskine Hospital, on the banks of the wide,

slow-running Clyde, created a charitable pathway for the medical treatment of veterans and helped them reunite both their families and the wider society.

The first Limbless Veterans branch (this network of branches would go on to become Blesma) is reported to have started in a room above a Glasgow pub, and the hospital's founding principles chime with Blesma's ethos to this day; to support veterans both in their recovery and in leading independent, fulfilling lives.

Erskine has since moved out of its original premises – the imposing baronial mansion Erskine House that had been gifted by a Glaswegian philanthropist – into a purpose-built campus complete with a care home, assisted living apartments and 44 cottages for independent living. Today, more than 800 residents benefit from its facilities and support every year.

The facility is currently home to four Blesma Members, but over the years many more have experienced the Erskine way,

CHARITY COLLABORATION



BSO Steve Burton (left) with Blesma Member and Erskine resident John O'Neill



which chief executive Ian Cumming MBE describes as an organisation 'with a strong heritage and a modern purpose'.

"Erskine was created as a result of Scotland's compassionate response to seeing our sons physically and mentally shattered by industrial-scale warfare in the trenches and on the high seas," he says. "There wasn't enough medical or prosthetic support for the wounded, but the people of Glasgow and its surrounds decided something had to be done. So Erskine was created by public generosity.

"Scottish citizens continue to instinctively respond to Erskine's needs. We were set up as a surgical hospital, but once the wounds were stabilised we turned our attention to rehabilitation and giving veterans the best possible future. We taught them skills such as carpentry, basket making, gardening, tailoring and barbering so they could have a future in Civvy Street. We continue to do that today within the modern charity."

IN THE BEGINNING

Erskine started life in 1916 as the Princess Louise Scottish Hospital for Limbless Sailors and Soldiers in an imposing baronial hall set in 200 acres near the town of Erskine. The hospital was named after its patron, and was equipped by donations from members of the public and wealthy business figures. With great ingenuity, the first medical director, Sir William Macewen, designed a new prosthetic – the Erskine Artificial Limb – with the help of patients and Clydeside shipyard craftsmen.

"I am incredibly proud of our history and what we do today," adds Ian, a former Wing Commander who served in the RAF Regiment for 27 years. "We have veterans who come to us for all sorts of reasons and range in age from their 20s to 90s. They may be separated by generations, and are thousands of miles from where they served, but when they sit down together the camaraderie is golden. That sense of





“I NOW LIVE IN A COTTAGE THAT COMBINES A STRONG MILITARY COMMUNITY WITH PERSONAL PRIVACY”

DANNY MAVOR

*Former Royal Scots Dragoons Guard
Danny, 38, was injured in a motorbike
accident. He lives in a cottage at Erskine.*

What was life like before the Army?

I was brought up in Glasgow and my youth was full of fun and mischief. I wasn't particularly drawn to academics, so I left school at 15 and got a job as a kitchen porter. It became clear that my next step was joining the Army. My first day of training was on my 16th birthday.

What was the impact of transitioning to military life at a young age?

It introduced me to the discipline my loving, supportive upbringing had lacked. It was demanding but allowed me to flourish, fuelling my passion for travel and adventure. I deployed to Iraq in 2005. It was fulfilling yet eye-opening.

How did an accident change your life?

Five years ago, a motorcycle accident resulted in catastrophic injuries: a broken neck, a shattered shoulder blade, and a severely damaged hip. The accident crushed my C4 vertebrae and paralysed me from the neck down. My recovery included a month-long induced coma and extensive rehabilitation.

What challenges did you face in post-accident care?

I was initially put on a dementia ward, and BSO Steve Burton was crucial during this time. He advocated fiercely for me, guiding me through the healthcare system and securing a care package that allowed me to focus on my recovery in a more suitable environment.

How have your experiences shaped current life?

I now live in an Erskine cottage that combines a strong military community with personal privacy. The view of the hills from my backyard is a constant reminder of my journey and the peace I've found. Before this, I spent three years at Erskine Care Home, enriched by the stories of residents who had survived wars and historic battles, and found lasting love. Their tales deepened my appreciation for the past and the sacrifices made by others, helping me regain my independence and enhancing my quality of life.

JOHN O'NEILL

John served in the Gulf War with the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards. He suffered head injuries in a fall at an Army barracks in Germany and now lives in a room in the main care home

Did you always want to be in the Army?

I'm from a village in Lanarkshire and worked as a butcher before moving to the greenhouses in Clydeside. I'd wanted to be in the Army growing up, so I joined up when I was 19. It was everything I had hoped it would be, and more.

Where did you serve?

I trained at Catterick and did my early days at Leconfield. I deployed to the Gulf War and spent six months there in motor transport. I served for almost 19 years in total, and my final rank was Sergeant.

How did you get injured?

In November 2000 I fell over a balcony at the married quarters on a base in Germany and sustained a head injury. I was treated in the British Military Hospital in Hanover, where I was sedated for eight weeks. From there, I was transferred to a hospital in Portsmouth then to Headley Court, and then to a rehabilitation centre in Lanarkshire to prepare for independent living.

How did Blesma and Erskine come into your life?

I looked after myself until five years ago, when I caught an infection in hospital that evolved into a brain infection. My health declined and I spent some time in emergency care, which was not good and made my physical and mental health worse. My sister fought for me to have full-time care and to come here, but she wouldn't have been able to do it without Steve Burton, Blesma and Audrey at the Armed Services Advice Project. Blesma was always on the end of the phone.

What has the difference been since you got to Erskine?

It has been the difference between night and day. I love it here. The staff are great and I'm with like-minded people. It is important for me to be in a military community. I am much happier and healthier here – my mental health in particular has benefitted, which is so important. This is home for me.



“I AM MUCH HAPPIER AND HEALTHIER HERE. MY MENTAL HEALTH IN PARTICULAR HAS BENEFITTED. THIS IS HOME”



BSO Steve Burton provides a vital link between Erskine and Blesma Members

community is amazing. It is all member led, and our members' committee has a huge influence on how Erskine works."

Steve Burton, a former Lieutenant Colonel who served in the Army for 37 years, is Blesma's Support Officer for Scotland and Northern Ireland. He is focused on fostering a close working relationship with the team at Erskine.

"Blesma has a strong connection with Erskine which comes from our similar heritages and the fact that Members have lived – and continue to live – both in the home and in the cottages. Both charities focus on supporting veterans, and we look to collaborate whenever possible to help our Members," he says. "Erskine is an inspiring facility, and it is great that Blesma Members can become part of its home and village, using its transitional accommodation as they rebuild their lives."

CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

Erskine, like all charities, has to live in the moment rather than in its history, whilst economic pressures – from reduced statutory support to a challenging fundraising climate – are very real. It has recognised the changing demographics and needs of its beneficiaries now that there are fewer WWII and National Service veterans, and has reduced its overall number of beds to synchronise with demand, whilst developing services to potentially offer care at home and community services across Scotland.

Erskine is also finding success with its community training and activity hubs, and with its transitional accommodation programme that gives younger veterans a chance to stabilise their lives.

"People want to stay close to their family and friends wherever possible, so we are developing a service to provide an element of care at home so veterans can keep their independence and dignity," adds Ian.

"Loneliness and isolation are challenges for veterans living in the community where injuries, ailing health, family bereavement and simply getting older can lock people into very difficult circumstances.

"It is sometimes a wicked spiral which can prove to be unhealthy, so we have opened an activity centre that is, in effect, a community centre where they can take part in anything from art and pottery classes to learning digital skills and carpentry. So far, it has attracted some 400 veterans and has 255 regular users, and is a model that we hope to replicate across Scotland.

"I'm a huge fan of Blesma and there's clearly an overlap to what we both do. We work collaboratively with Steve Burton, who is the lead contact for our Blesma beneficiaries and is a strong advocate for their care.

"Erskine and Blesma have clearly evolved a great deal since WWI and continue to adapt to meet the challenges and circumstances in front of them with the sole aim of doing the best for limbless veterans."

One phone call changed everything

CYRIL CRAMPIN HAD NO IDEA THAT HE WAS ENTITLED TO A WAR PENSION UNTIL HE SPOKE TO BLESMA DECADES AFTER HE WAS INJURED. TO SHOW HIS GRATITUDE, HE DECIDED HE WOULD INCLUDE THE ASSOCIATION IN HIS WILL

A newspaper advert caught Cyril Crampin's eye as he approached retirement. The former Royal Army Service Corps soldier responded to a Blesma advert offering advice about accessing a disabled rail card, but instead Cyril ended up getting help to correct a 36-year injustice after he was injured during National Service. That phone call led to Blesma staff guiding him towards a War Pension that had been denied him after he was involved in a road traffic accident as he left camp for Easter leave in 1955. Cyril, now 89, was knocked off his motorbike by a car overtaking on the wrong side of the road on a blind hill. He was left "unconscious for a week or so and sustained many injuries", including the amputation of his right leg.

"Thankfully, I don't recall anything about the accident itself – I just remember waking up in hospital and being told very firmly that the Forces were not liable in any way as I was leaving the barracks rather than going to them," says Cyril, who was based at the Leaton Command Supply Depot, near Shrewsbury, during his National Service. "All those years went

by and it was only when I saw the Blesma advert that I was able to finally get the War Pension thanks to the help from members of staff at Head Office."

Cyril has now been a Member for more than 30 years. He credits the Association with helping him and his wife Hazel, 83, enjoy a fuller life, and has made a gift in his Will to Blesma to show his appreciation.

"Getting the War Pension made a difference to us, and getting it backdated has made our retirement more comfortable," he says. "Blesma has always been there for us whenever we've needed support. I can pick up the phone to Head Office and someone is always happy to help. With a Will, you always look after your family first, but it is good and fitting to remember those who have helped you, and Blesma has certainly done that for us."

REMEMBERING THE BLITZ

Cyril, who has attended the Remembrance Parade at The Cenotaph with the Association for a number of years, had an earlier brush with tragedy as a five year old growing up in East London when the family's shop was hit in a German WWII bombing raid.

"The shop front was completely smashed and my father very nearly lost his life," says Cyril. "We were in the back room under a table and managed to get out

Cyril and Hazel have been married for 63 years. Cyril has lived with an amputation to his right leg for longer than that



Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Andy Bate



Above: Cyril was unaware that he was entitled to a War Pension until he spoke to Blesma

through the back door and get to the air raid shelter,” he says. “It was all very frightening for a five year old!” The family relocated to another part of east London and continued trading, but Cyril would go on to choose a career with British Rail rather than follow in the family business. He worked in the continental travel department at Victoria Station until he was called up for National Service. He was 18 months into his posting, and riding home on his BSA Bantam, when he was injured. “I don’t remember anything about the accident, which completely changed my life,” he says. “I was going up a hill when a car tried to overtake in the opposite direction. They said I couldn’t have avoided it. The car overturned a few times, but the driver of another car phoned the emergency services and I was taken to a hospital in Rugby.

“They had to amputate my right leg after about a week because gangrene had set in, but I was grateful

it was below the knee. Immediately, my attitude was that it was my life and I had to make the best of it. There was nothing I could have done differently to avoid the crash, my life changed completely in that one moment and I had to focus on recovering.

“I did get compensation from the driver, but the Army was very clear that it was not liable. They said that if I had been returning to camp, I would have been covered and given a pension, but as I was leaving it was not their responsibility. I assumed that was right.”

A HAPPY AND COMFORTABLE RETIREMENT

Cyril was fitted with a prosthetic leg at Roehampton Hospital and carried on with his life, meeting Hazel during a trip from London to Sheffield to watch a singer perform. Romance blossomed and the couple have now been married for 63 years, and have two children, six grand-children and two great-grandsons.

“Immediately, my attitude was that it was my life and I had to make the best of it”

A framed message from the late Queen Elizabeth II congratulating them on their diamond wedding anniversary has pride of place in their front room.

“When I spotted the Blesma advert in a newspaper I wanted a bit of advice about rail tickets, but when they discovered I was an amputee they encouraged me to write to the Ministry of Defence – and to be persistent!” says Cyril. “It took quite a few letters, but after about two years the MoD said I was eligible for the pension, which was backdated. It has given us a happier and more comfortable retirement than we might have imagined.”

Steve Burrell, BSO for London and the South East, is Cyril’s Support Officer. “It was great that we were initially able to help Cyril with his War Pension,” says Steve, “but we are always assessing our Members’ needs, and last year provided Cyril and Hazel with some equipment to help them get about, as well as an Attendance Allowance for some home help.

“We are committed to always being there for our Members. Cyril and Hazel understand what Blesma stands for and they clearly want to see our work continue into the future. They very much embody our ethos of Member supporting Member.”

It is simple to leave a gift in your Will to Blesma so that the Association can continue its vital work supporting Members. Please see the panel (right) for more information on legacy giving

Leaving a gift in your Will

Gifts in Wills are an 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. The Association partners with two free Will writing services that can be accessed online or via telephone.

“It is very easy to set up or get advice on leaving a gift in your Will,” says Anna Scalera, Head of Fundraising. “Cyril completed a form requesting more information and then made arrangements through one of the services. It was very kind of him, and we appreciate everyone who chooses to do that for us.”

Blesma offers free Will writing services through the National Free Wills Network and Octopus Legacy, while Members can also **speak to Head Office on 020 8548 7085 or email the team at legacies@blesma.org for advice.**

“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,” adds Anna. “We are grateful to anyone who leaves a gift as it is a wonderful act of generosity. 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.”

For more advice on leaving a gift in your Will, please visit 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





1 in 5 Blesma
Members is
helped through
gifts in Wills

National Free
Wills Network
send a Will
writing pack by
post or email

Octopus Legacy
online process
takes just
15 minutes

No obligation
to leave a gift

Free Will Writing Service

Blesma is partnered with two free Will writing services,
for anyone wishing to leave a gift in their Will.

The National Free Wills Network will connect you to a local solicitor
to guide you through the process of writing or amending your Will.

Octopus Legacy's online service is quick and easy,
and every Will is checked by their team of qualified solicitors.

A gift in your Will helps us be there for limbless and injured veterans. Always.

octopuslegacy



Learn more

Contact
legacies@blesma.org
020 8548 7085

Visit
blesma.org/legacy

Bulletin

Blesma's garden is back to its very best

Volunteers dig deep during the winter months to spruce up Blesma's garden at the NMA in time for summer

The Blesma Garden and Orchard at the National Memorial Arboretum has had a spruce up to help it blossom back to its full glory. Member Paul Woolley, who is part of the Arboretum's volunteer gardening force, noticed that several trees had died over the winter and began working with BSO Midlands Vanessa Lucas to organise their replacement.

The Association funded five standard and five cordon trees for the garden, and a team of hardy Blesma volunteers did the spade work to get the new specimens in place in late February.

"I saw that several of the 76 trees in the garden and orchard had died, and Blesma was very quick to make sure we could replace them," said Paul, who is ex-RAF and a former head gardener at a hotel. "Sadly, I couldn't be there on the day of the re-planting, but it was a job well done and the garden looks great."

The Blesma gardening crew featured Sean Povey, Jeff Price and partner Sarah Pear, Steve Beasley, Ben Steele and Sarah Criddle, who is the Outreach Officer for the Midlands.



A special place: the Blesma Garden and Orchard at the NMA

Words: Danny Buckland

"The garden and orchard is a special place for many and a wonderful place to visit, so we are delighted that it is back to looking its very best," said Vanessa. "The team were great, and special thanks must go to Arboretum Head Gardener Paul Johnson

and Paul Woolley for helping to make this happen."

The Blesma Garden and Orchard is one of more than 150 different plots at the National Memorial Arboretum, near Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire.

"The garden and orchard is a special place for many and a wonderful place to visit, so we are delighted that it is back to looking its very best"

Wales and West: Formal support and the benefit of social groups

The last three months have been extremely varied, with social lunches, visits to Limb Centres, delivering disability equipment, visiting hospitals, attending meetings with local councils, health boards, the Welsh Government and much more. It's as busy as ever, if not more so.

Tom has been working closely with NHS partners in South and North Wales to get the Blesma message out to all the GP clusters. This will hopefully bring more Members into the fold over the coming months. Over the last few months, we have sadly lost some of our Members and Widows, and Blesma will be a poorer Association without them.

SUPPORT AND PROSTHETICS PROVISION – INCREASING WELLBEING

As you will see on p34, Tom and Jason invited the Blesma media team to visit the Cardiff Limb Centre in March to highlight the increasingly important relationship between Welsh Government, Welsh Health, the three Limb Centres and Blesma. Over the years, this partnership has increased communication in a positive way and built trust, transparency, and openness amongst the partners.

This, along with managing the increasing expectations of our Members and at the same time advocating for their needs, has allowed for a positive improvement in prosthetics provision.

More routine visits have been made to Members in various parts of Wales and West, although priority will always be given to those most in need and those who call the BSO for help and support. With the number of Members slowly increasing and the difficult geography in Wales and West, it isn't always easy to get out to see everyone in a timely fashion, but more than 80 visits to Members have taken place over the last three months, including visits to Members' homes, Limb Centres and hospitals.



Mitch Singleton enjoying his flight at i-Fly Manchester on a Blesma Outreach activity

Grants to Members have remained steady, but in this increasingly difficult time the focus is on Member need. The priority is on getting support to those who are in financial difficulty or are not being supported appropriately by statutory services. Sometimes, it has been necessary to carry out a financial assessment or ask the Member to contribute, but it has always been with the Member's needs firmly in mind. As a Service charity, Blesma reacts and delivers support quickly where it's most needed. This will always remain the focus for Wales and West.

FUN AND VARIED OUTREACH PROGRAMME – ENHANCING ACTIVITY

Jason has continued to deliver a varied and packed social programme. The forecast of events went out for Members to choose which activities and social lunches they'd like to take part in, and we are increasingly seeing larger groups forming with a variety of Members, their families and carers. Between 01 February

and 30 April, Jason delivered 11 activities and 10 social lunches. Aside from this, he has been assisting Tom with visits to Members and Widows to reduce isolation, offering access to the social calendar and delivering disability equipment to those who need it. Various handcycles and wheelchairs have been delivered to Members, and Jason has visited 16 Members at home to check on their wellbeing and provide low-level wellbeing support to assist Tom as part of a support team effort.

FOCUS ON SOCIAL GROUPS – STRENGTHENING CONNECTION

As part of the Wales and West future plan, informal social groups were formed in Cardiff, Swansea, Hereford, Gloucester, Wrexham, Colwyn Bay and the Wirral. Most of these have developed well and are steadily growing, with Members making crucial connections and forming longstanding friendships. However, we would like to see more Members attending our social groups in the north of the area.



Informal social groups are growing in the Area. Here, members of the Gloucestershire social group enjoy lunch together



Falklands veteran Steve Fisher being cast for a new socket at Swansea Limb Centre

In Wrexham alone, we have more than 20 Members, but this does not seem to be a place where Members wish to come together to form a social group. In Deeside and the Wirral we have 12 and 33 Members respectively. This does not include the other areas linking across from Worcestershire and Chester who could all join a social group within a reasonable travelling distance. The current social



Ken Marsden (former Royal Artillery) from West Wales during a home visit

groups that are positive examples are in Swansea, Hereford, Gloucester and Cardiff. These regularly attract 20 or more Members at a time, and there are some real bonds forming. Members from the north of the area even travel down to join the Hereford and Gloucester groups, and thoroughly enjoy the company of other Members going through the same difficulties. Let's do it in North Wales

and the west of England! Tom has now communicated with Members in the area who are within easy reach of these informal social groups. Please contact Tom and Jason directly or look out for the forecast of events which will land on your doorstep or in an email. The letter highlights the ways to connect to a social group, so hopefully we will see more Members joining us for lunch, coffee and cake, or just a quick catch up.

REFERRALS

Clinicians and partners reading this article can contact Tom or refer veterans in Wales and West to Blesma using our website www.blesma.org or using the Blesma Wales and West Referral Form – supplied on request.

Contact Tom or Jason for any support needs or to attend an activity or social group. Their contact details can be found on page 68.

Tom and Jason

Northern Ireland: From the police to painting and personal stories

Waking up to bird song and (dare I say) sunshine and a little warmth can be uplifting, especially as we see more wildlife emerge and outdoor spaces begin to blossom – it's time to leave the cold behind! This season, we have enjoyed face-to-face activities, fundraising events, get togethers online and at-home projects – all with the aim of building on fellowship, learning and fun.

Members visited the Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI) in a 'Keeping People Safe' activity – a huge thank you goes to the officers who took the time to chat to us about the roles and tasks they conduct and the operational challenges they face. Members were able to speak to the Road Police Interceptors (with two lucky enough to hitch a ride), the Armed Response Unit, Search & Recovery Unit and Dog Section. We were shown the trusting partnership between dog and handler, and learned about the wide range of duties they undertake; from tracking suspects and missing persons to detecting drugs and explosives.

Chief Inspector Graham Dodds kindly presented a print to Blesma, with Gardiner Mitchell, a member of 66 years, accepting it on the charity's behalf.

CAKES, CROPS AND FISTICUFFS

Elsewhere, the sentiment that 'it doesn't have to be perfect to be beautiful' resonated with our bakers as they created hand-decorated cakes with a healthy spoonful of good humour. It was a pleasure to be able to deliver two cakes to the Somme Nursing Home in Belfast.

Members also had a grand day out at Florence Court. The house and garden are steeped in history and Members learned about how the vast gardens supplied the estate and surrounding areas.

Within Members' own outdoor spaces, it was time to get the 'Grow Your Own' projects underway with seed planting as Members shared hints about how to harvest the best crop. Members also dived into the colourful world of



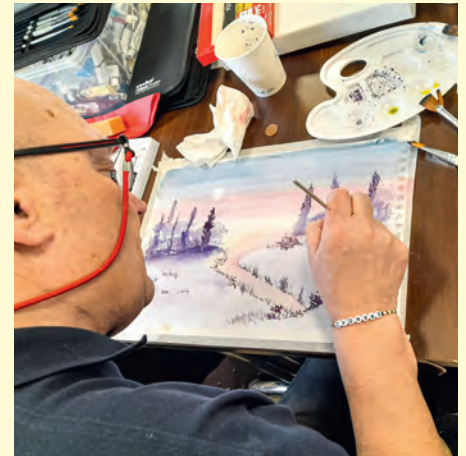
PSNI Search Dog Nittu loving the attention from Blesma Members



Fiona Morrison (Outreach Officer NI) pays Stephen Fitzsimons a home visit

watercolour painting, with everyone pleasantly surprised to see the results of their finished paintings. Meanwhile, for those who take part in the at-home projects it was time for something a little different – decorating oyster shells.

It is always a privilege to support those who choose to fundraise for Blesma, and a big thank you goes to Robin Brown who challenged himself with an intensive eight-week training programme before stepping into the ring at a White Collar Boxing event.



Paul Fisher seems to have nailed his first attempt at watercolour painting



Robin Brown supported Blesma by taking part in a White Collar Boxing event

A home visit offers a personal connection that is important to so many of our Members and provides a sense of community and support. I have been visiting Stephen in his home for six years and I learn something new each visit; this time, we took a walk down memory lane and I found out that he had been awarded the British Empire Medal in the 1960s. My parting words are always; 'you need to write a book'!

Fiona Morrison, Outreach Officer

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

North East

FACE TO FACE IS FABULOUS

A visit to the Castle Museum in York in May was a fabulous success. Some of the feedback included: 'Thank you to Adele for another amazing day out,' and 'Adele always makes such an effort for all the group to have loads of fun.'

Meanwhile, an area lunch allowed volunteers to meet with Members face to face, cementing relationships. "It was great to catch up after my amputation and meet with my Welfare Rep volunteer," said one Member. "He often checks in on the phone, so it was nice to finally meet up"

Elsewhere, a collaboration lunch with East Durham Veterans Trust and The Chelsea Pensioners Outreach Programme was a great success, while afternoon tea at the Tong Garden Centre allowed Members to get together and share their news.

"It was nice to meet other Members," said Mary Hunter. "It was my first time at an Outreach event, everyone was friendly, and I was taken to the event and brought back home again. Thank you, I will now attend more if I can get to them." *Adele Miller, Outreach Officer*

Midlands

It's been lovely to get to know our wonderful Members and their families. Members have enjoyed some great activities recently, while BSO Sarah is working hard to deliver an exciting programme of events for the next few months. Here are just a few of the incredible and popular social and wellbeing events we have been able to provide thanks to our generous supporters:

NEWARK AIR MUSEUM

Ten Members, partners and staff – including some new faces – enjoyed an interesting and fun day at Newark Air Museum. The museum, on the former



Blesma Members and their families from the North East visit the Castle Museum in York

RAF station at Winthorpe, near Newark-on-Trent, houses a variety of aircraft.

We enjoyed an informative guided tour, explored the aircraft, and had a nice lunch – and those who wished were able to wander around the memorial garden.

CADBURY WORLD FAMILY EVENT

This fabulous event provided us with the opportunity to spend quality time with family and friends. Nine Members, together with their spouses, children and grandchildren, had a tour of the factory and enjoyed some chocolate. Some took



The competitive spirit came out when Members in the South West tried archery

advantage of the discount shop before enjoying lunch in a private room.

Our Blesma Brunches prove to be as popular as ever and are held regularly across the Midlands. They are invaluable in allowing Members to get together, share stories and get to know each other over a nice breakfast.

Sarah Criddle, Outreach Officer

South West

AREAS MEET UP AT MUSEUM

This spring has seen a lot more home visits and activities taking place; from archery in Cornwall (there was a bit of healthy competition between the Outreach and Support Officers!), to fish and chips on The Barbican in Plymouth, to a tour of the Exeter Chiefs' rugby stadium.

April saw a joint venture with Members from the South area enjoying a rare day of sunshine at Beaulieu House and Car Museum, with more than 70 Members and family members taking part. Future planned trips include sailing, a cycle ride, golf, an owl sanctuary visit and various lunches. And we have welcomed new Members into the fold!

Gordon Clark, Outreach Officer

Scotland: Clay coos, curling and learning to rock climb

FLOWER POWER

Blesma Member Mark Strachan has been busy fundraising using the power of wildflower seeds. He harvested more than 26 varieties of seed from his garden before packaging them up and posting them out to budding gardeners across the UK. In total, he raised £270. A big thank you to Mark for his efforts.

HANG ON!

These were the words of the day when a group of intrepid Members arrived at Above Adventure in Kilmarnock for an introduction to rock climbing. For some, this was a new activity, whereas others were seasoned climbers. The instructors soon had everyone harnessed and roped up, ready to climb. There were some impressive moves from everyone as they climbed with copious amounts of grit and determination in the effort to reach the top. Rumour has it there were a few sore muscles the following day!

BEAUTIFUL BLOOMS AND CLAY COOS

The creative talent of our Scottish Members shows no bounds, and this was emphasised in two recent crafting activities. A rather messy make-at-home project involving clay resulted in some very cute and cheeky looking Highland 'coos'. This was followed by an online workshop with Inion Arts to make an Easter lily. It was hard to believe how a roll of wire and a pot of resin was going to turn into anything resembling a flower, but with expert tuition from Abigail and some sore fingers from fiddling with the wire, Easter lilies were soon springing to life with relative ease. A very therapeutic way to spend an afternoon!

TAKE OFF

A visit to the Newton flight simulators at Glasgow Science Centre was a high-flying affair, with Members enjoying the opportunity to 'fly' a light aircraft from a huge range of airfields and airports across



Members pay a visit to Lady Haig's Poppy Factory in Edinburgh



'Flying' at the Glasgow Science Centre



Giving street curling a go in Stirling



Making clay 'coos' in an at-home project



Members get an intro to rock climbing

North West: 10-pin bowling, alpacas and DIY for all

the world. There was plenty of hilarity as runways were missed, trees obliterated, and landing gear dismissed as unnecessary. However, we also saw some competent flying, with several barrel rolls completed in a very laid-back manner.

POPPIES GALORE

After several postponed visits, we finally made it to Lady Haig's Poppy Factory in Edinburgh for a tour to see where all the poppies are made for the Scottish Poppy Appeal. It would be easy to think that the factory is only busy in the run-up to Remembrance Day, but production is year-round, and it was certainly a hive of industry on a cold February day.

Our guide gave us a fascinating insight into the history of Lady Haig and the factory. We were also able to watch the factory team, who are all veterans, making the poppies and wreaths, and it was interesting to see how the Scottish poppy differs from its English counterpart.

A CLEAN SWEEP

With the curling season coming to an end and the ice put 'on ice' until October, how do you keep curling throughout the summer? The answer is street curling – just like curling but on an inflatable 'rink'. With help from coach Dottie and Scottish Curling's Disability and Inclusion Development Officer Rhiannon, we tried street curling at The Peak in Stirling.

After a short lesson on the rules, terminology and tactics (this proved to be very important later) we set off in pairs to practise. Once our techniques were refined, we were split into two teams for a game. Hard to believe, but at this point it quickly became very competitive, with teams in secret huddles discussing moves and tactics! A very enjoyable game ensued with plenty of rivalry and laughter. We look forward to working with Scottish Curling again later in the year for some more curling on ice.

Rachael Kennedy
Outreach Officer

Support Officer Amanda visited 33 Members either at home or at other venues including Limb Centres between February and April. This included welcoming several new Members to Blesma North West. She also attended fundraising events, corporate events and several Armed Forces Covenant meetings across the region to help raise Blesma's profile and connect with organisations that may be of use to Members.

We have developed a good working relationship with the Military Preparation Training Colleges across the North West, and have been invited to support, visit and talk to the young recruits.

Outreach Officer Cath has been busy putting on activities and planning for the summer. Over the past few months events have included a very competitive 10-pin bowling activity in February (demands have been made for a rematch). Blesma's Chief Executive joined Cath, Amanda and 10 Members for quad biking in the Cheshire countryside in March. A few new Members joined in, which was great to see.

The Blesma breakfasts each month continue to be very popular, with 22 Members attending one in Preston! The Alpaca Trek in April proved to be very

beneficial and therapeutic (they are considered to be therapy animals because of their relaxed and calming demeanour).

It was great to see new faces at the Anfield stadium tour, which was very informative and interesting. It also provided a meeting between two Members who had not seen each other for some years, which gave them an opportunity to catch up and renew their friendship.

'Dig In' woodwork workshops continue every month for expert DIYers and beginners alike, while the online craft event continues to be popular with the ladies' craft group. Festive wreaths and soap making have given way to beautiful paper flowers to welcome in spring.

Upcoming events will include social lunches and a pottery class, as well as the more adrenaline-fuelled Zipline in Snowdonia. Family events through the summer holidays will include trips to Chester Zoo and Gulliver's World, while Amanda will continue to travel across the region visiting new and existing Members.

If you would like to arrange a visit please contact Amanda on 07825 536362 or email her on bsonw@blesma.org.

Amanda Brownlie
Support Officer



Just a few of the activities that Members and their families have done in the North West

News from the Branches: AGMs, lunches and a visit to the NMA

SUTTON, MERTON AND DISTRICT BRANCH

Our Branch AGM was held on Wednesday 17 April and we were delighted to welcome Blesma Chief Executive Vivienne Buck, our BSO Steve Burrell and Outreach Officer Jess Linge, and Branch members. Also invited were our Branch supporters: the local ladies' and men's bowlers, the Alfred Smedley Charitable Trust and Merton Veterans Healthwatch.

Our guest and speaker was Chelsea Pensioner Chris Fen. Following the formalities and Parish notices we enjoyed a delicious buffet lunch courtesy of the Morden Brook team, where we have held our meetings for a decade. I cannot praise them highly enough. It was a lively, social afternoon during which we chatted and enjoyed each others' company.

This year, the Branch celebrates its 75th anniversary, our diamond jubilee. We will celebrate this in July when we will honour the heroic guys who started the Branch and the loyal folk who have given of their time over the years and steered us through many turbulent times.

We have to thank HQ staff for all their invaluable support. It is a real pleasure to be a family branch of the Blesma tree.

Annie MacMillan, Chair

SOUTHAMPTON, WINCHESTER AND DISTRICT BRANCH

The Branch hopes that all Members and Widows are well. Sadly, one of our Widows, Jacqueline Pritchard-Davies, passed away on 19 April, may she rest in peace. Her late husband was a Bomb Disposal Officer in the Army.

We held our spring lunch at the Woodland Lodge Hotel on the edge of the New Forest in memory of a previous Social Secretary, Shealia Rayner, who passed away a couple of years ago as she had remembered the Branch in her Will. We were also delighted to welcome Pat Donnachie and Amy Barnes, Support and Outreach Officers for the South, as our guests. The Branch would like to thank



Blesma Chief Executive Vivienne Buck attends the Sutton, Merton and District Branch AGM

them and Blesma HQ for their support. We had an excellent lunch and would like to thank Caroline Pedrick, our Social Secretary, for organising the event.

Our Chairman, David Rowe, organises two trips on the boat the *Alison MacGregor* during the summer months. The first sailing in June is full, but if any Branch Member or Widow would like to go on the second one (which will be later in the summer), they should contact David on 02380 551891. Please



leave David a message and he will call you back.

The Branch meets every fourth Monday of the month at the Totton Community Centre, where Members enjoy a buffet lunch and listen to a guest speaker. Should any Member or Widow living in the area wish to join the Branch, they would be most welcome. You should contact myself on 01202 764168 for further information.

Stephen Coltman OBE
Honorary Secretary

GREAT YARMOUTH AND LOWESTOFT BRANCH

The Branch held its AGM in February and was delighted that members were keen for the Branch to continue. We welcomed Chief Executive, Vivienne Buck, BSO Kevin Long and Outreach Officer Francesca Anastasio, and Branch members were able to engage with them over lunch.

In April, Branch funds enabled several members to visit the National Memorial



The Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft Branch visited the National Memorial Arboretum in April

Arboretum. A warm, sunny day allowed members to explore many memorials, including the Blesma Memorial Garden. The visit included a stay at a Warners Hotel, giving members the opportunity to socialise for longer than they normally would at our lunch meetings. The trip contributed to positive wellbeing for all.

Forthcoming Branch activities include afternoon tea in July and our usual christmas lunch. We continue to try to attract new members by engaging with our Outreach Officer, Francesca, and welcome any members from the East region who are able to join us.

For more information, please contact Bob (chair.yarmouth@blesma.org; 07951 292681) or Helen (secretary.yarmouth@blesma.org; 07766 982904).

Helen Cullen
Honorary Secretary

NOTTINGHAM BRANCH

The Branch continues to flourish, meeting throughout the year and welcoming new

members. Our meetings/lunches for 2024 will be held at The Vale Hotel, Daybrook, Nottingham on the following dates:

09 July at 11.30

10 September at 12.30

12 November at 11.30

As this issue went to press we were planning on holding a Branch and Blesma fundraising/awareness stand at Thoresby Hall, Nottinghamshire on Saturday 18 May. We were to be joining a 'Spirit of Wartime' military event for the first time, and hoping to showcase some of the incredible ways that Blesma supports its Members. A Branch summer evening dinner is also being planned, with venue and dates 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 David Ledger by calling 07794 309927 or by email at secretary.nottingham@blesma.org.

David Ledger
Honorary Secretary

Bulletin brief



IT'S WARWICKSHIRE FOR WIDOWS WEEK

Blesma Widows enjoyed a fun-filled week in Warwickshire in May which included two sun-scorched cultural days: a Shakespeare experience took them to Stratford-upon-Avon and a visit to Warwick Castle wowed the group. Afternoon teas ended what were fabulous days, and the journeys home were made in exhausted silence.

"Evening cabarets gave everyone the chance to relax – or strut their stuff!" said Fiona Morrison, Outreach Officer for Northern Ireland. "Later in the week, The Drive Project hosted a storytelling workshop, and the ladies were able to relax with spa treatments before we all had to say our fond farewells."



BLESMA AND BROLLIES AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE

In May, Jackie Peatfield Senior Finance Officer, Julie Wilkins Finance Officer, Fiona Morrison, Outreach Officer Northern Ireland, her husband Lachie Morrison, Member Jonathan Bell and his wife Katie represented Blesma at a Buckingham Palace Garden Party.

The downpour did nothing to dampen the spirits and everyone agreed it was a privilege to attend the event, which was made even better because the group were introduced to Blesma's patron, the Duke of Gloucester.

Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care

Welcome 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 either contact their Support Officer for further information about their benefit entitlement or contact Blesma's Benefits and Social Care Adviser Liz Watling on 020 8548 7080 or by emailing her at iwabenefits@blesma.org. These contact details are for Blesma Members only.

In this issue, the focus is on disability benefits, which are for people who have difficulty with their personal care or, in some cases, their mobility. The difficulties can be due to a physical or mental health condition. Which benefit to claim will depend on your age at the first point of making the claim, and where you live.

If you are working age and live in England, Northern Ireland or Wales, you will need to claim Personal Independence Payment. If you live in Scotland you will need to claim Adult Disability Payment.

If you are pension age and living anywhere in the UK, you will need to claim Attendance Allowance.

These disability benefits are

- Not means tested (it does not matter how much income or capital you have)
- Tax free
- Paid whether you are in or out of work

Below is a summary of the benefits. For more information on the criteria please see the Blesma website at www.blesma.org/understanding-benefits or speak to your Support Officer.

PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE PAYMENT

Personal Independence Payment is for people who have difficulty with their daily living activities, such as preparing food, washing and bathing or social engagement

(the Daily Living Component) or difficulty getting around (the Mobility Component). It is administered by the Department for Work and Pensions.

You can claim Personal Independence Payment if you meet all the following:

- You live in England, Northern Ireland or Wales
- You are aged between 16 and state pension age when you claim
- You satisfy the points scoring assessment (see below)
- You satisfy the required period condition (your difficulties must have been present for three months before your claim and expected to last a further nine months after your claim)
- You are present in the UK and have been for no less than 104 weeks in the last 156 weeks (i.e. two out of the last three years)
- You are not subject to immigration control

Personal Independence Payment is based on the effect your long-term health condition or disability has on your daily life, not the condition or disability itself. You can receive it if you live alone and you do not need to have a carer. You can continue to receive Personal Independence Payment after state pension age as long as you continue to meet the criteria.

You will need to meet the disability conditions by satisfying a points-based assessment which will evaluate your ability to undertake specific activities. Decisions can be made based on the information you write on the form and from any supporting evidence you include, such as a letter from someone who knows you well (a relative, carer or medical practitioner). However, most claims will require you to take part in a telephone, video or face-to-face assessment.

Personal Independence Payment can be paid at one of two rates for each component, depending on the number of points scored in the assessment:

DAILY LIVING COMPONENT

Standard rate: £72.65 per week

Enhanced rate: £108.55 per week

MOBILITY COMPONENT

Standard rate: £28.70 per week

Enhanced rate: £75.75 per week

If you are already paid one of the following allowances, you will not be able to receive the Daily Living Component of Personal Independence Payment if they are paid at an equivalent or higher amount:

- Constant Attendance Allowance paid with War Pension
- Constant Attendance Allowance paid with Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

If you are already paid the following allowance you will not be able to receive the Mobility Component of Personal Independence Payment:

- War Pension Mobility Supplement

If you are already paid the following allowance you will not be able to receive Personal Independence Payment Daily Living or Mobility Component:

- Armed Forces Independence Payment paid with Armed Forces Compensation Scheme

ADULT DISABILITY PAYMENT

The Scottish Government has devolved powers over some benefits. Adult Disability Payment is a relatively new benefit, which is administered by Social Security Scotland. It is a replacement for Personal Independence Payment in Scotland and there are many similarities between the two benefits.

Adult Disability Payment is for people who have difficulty with their daily living activities, such as preparing food, washing and bathing or social engagement (the Daily Living Component) or difficulty getting around (the Mobility Component).

You can claim Adult Disability Payment if you meet all the following:

- You live in Scotland
- You are aged between 16 and state



- You satisfy the points scoring assessment (see below)
- You satisfy the required period condition (your difficulties must have been present for three months before your claim and expected to last a further nine months after your claim)
- You have resided in the common travel area (UK, Channel Islands, Isle of Man, Republic of Ireland) for 26 weeks out of the last 52
- You are not subject to immigration control

If you already receive Personal Independence Payment or Working Age Disability Living Allowance, at some point you will be transferred to Adult Disability Payment. The transfer will take place if:

- You report a change of circumstances to the Department for Work and Pensions
- Your existing award of Personal Independence Payment or Disability Living Allowance is coming up for renewal, or
- You ask to move to Adult Disability Payment

If none of the above apply, you will be transferred to Adult Disability Payment on a date selected by Social Security Scotland.

Adult Disability Payment is based on the effect your long-term health condition or disability has on your daily life, not the condition or disability itself. You can receive it if you live alone and you do not need to have a carer. You can continue to receive Personal Independence Payment after state pension age as long as you continue to meet the criteria.

You will need to meet the disability conditions, which means satisfying a points-based assessment which evaluates your ability to undertake specific activities. Decisions can be made based on the information you write on the form and from any supporting evidence you include, such as a letter from someone who knows you well (a relative, carer or medical practitioner). However, most claims will require you to take part in a telephone, video or face-to-face assessment.

Adult Disability Payment can be paid at one of two rates for each component,

dependent on the number of points scored in the assessment:

DAILY LIVING COMPONENT

Standard rate: £72.65 per week
Enhanced rate: £108.55 per week

MOBILITY COMPONENT

Standard rate: £28.70 per week
Enhanced rate: £75.75 per week

If you are already paid one of the following allowances, you will not be able to receive the Daily Living Component of Adult Disability Payment if they are paid at an equivalent or higher amount:

- Constant Attendance Allowance paid with War Pension
- Constant Attendance Allowance paid with Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

If you are already paid the following allowance you will not be able to receive the Mobility Component of Adult Disability Payment

- War Pension Mobility Supplement

Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care (continued)

If you are already paid the following allowance you will not be able to receive Adult Disability Payment Daily Living or Mobility Component

- Armed Forces Independence Payment paid with Armed Forces Compensation Scheme

ATTENDANCE ALLOWANCE

Attendance Allowance is for people who are over state pension age and who require assistance with their personal care. This can include difficulties with their personal care or difficulty maintaining their safety. It is administered by the Department for Work and Pensions.

You can claim Attendance Allowance if you meet all the following:

- You are state pension age or over
- You have had care or supervision needs for the last six months (known as the qualifying period)
- You are present in the UK and have been for no less than 104 out of the last 156 weeks (i.e. two out of the last three years)
- You are habitually resident and not subject to immigration control
- You satisfy one of the disability tests (see below)

Attendance Allowance is based on the effect your long-term health condition or disability has on your daily life, not the condition or disability itself. You can receive it if you live alone and you do not need to have a carer. If you already receive Personal Independence Payment or Adult Disability Payment, you cannot receive Attendance Allowance.

Attendance Allowance can be paid at one of two rates depending on the level of care required:

Lower rate: £72.65 per week
(for daytime or nighttime care needs)

Higher rate: £108.55 per week
(for daytime and nighttime care needs)

If you are already paid one of the following allowances you will not be able to receive



Attendance Allowance if they are paid at an equivalent or higher amount:

- Constant Attendance Allowance paid with War Pension
- Constant Attendance Allowance paid with Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

If you are already paid the following allowance you will not be able to receive Attendance Allowance:

- Armed Forces Independence Payment paid with Armed Forces Compensation Scheme

To satisfy the disability tests you must meet at least one of the following four conditions. You must be so severely disabled physically or mentally that you require from another person:

DURING THE DAY

- Attention throughout the day in connection with your personal care, or
- Supervision throughout the day in order to avoid substantial danger to yourself or others

DURING THE NIGHT

- Attention in connection with your personal care, or
- In order to avoid substantial danger to yourself or others, another person to be awake for a prolonged period or at frequent intervals for the purpose of watching over you

Henry Wuga

1924-2024

Blesma is sad to report the passing of Henry Wuga shortly after his 100th birthday. Henry, who escaped Nazi Germany as a child, was a towering figure on Blesma ski trips where he and his late wife Ingrid would coax Members onto the slopes for life-enhancing experiences. The couple were inspirational and ever-present on the winter trips for more than 20 years, helping hundreds of Members, many of whom became lifelong friends.

“I had the privilege of knowing Henry and Ingrid for around 25 years after meeting them on my first ski trip,” said Blesma Member Brendan West. “There was a gentleness and kindness about them, and they were an integral part of those trips, helping Members learn to ski but also giving them the confidence to be independent, which had an impact far beyond skiing.

“They gave so much of themselves and their time to help others and they loved being part of the Blesma family. They are both missed by so many.”

Henry was evacuated to the UK in the run-up to World War II but was interned just before his 16th birthday as a suspected spy. Henry was released after 10 months and, after the war, ran a successful catering and events business in Glasgow. After retiring, the couple became leading lights in the Skibob Association of Great Britain, where they were introduced to Blesma.

“They were amazing people and raised more than £100,000 for Blesma over the years,” added Brendan. “They did more than teach people to ski, they gave them the encouragement to do their own thing and take ownership of their lives.”

Henry’s daughter, Gillian Field, said of her parents: “Mum and dad shared their Holocaust experience with thousands of school children in Scotland. They engaged with people of all ages, and loved working with Blesma because they found it so rewarding. Being part of the Blesma family was an integral part of their retirement and it was an opportunity to give back – repaying the kindness shown to them by others when they started their new lives in Scotland.

“To us, he was just Dad, but the many condolence messages we have had reinforce what we knew – that he was pretty special. He was kind, resilient and inspiring to so many. He was also full of stories and fun, and was definitely a force for good.”



Henry Wuga with his wife Ingrid

Those who have passed away

May they rest in peace

ANDERSON I J M	Royal Air Force	16/10/23
BIGGS JW	Army	31/05/23
BLACKWELL J		07/03/24
BLANCHARD R W	Royal Air Force	16/03/24
CAMPBELL DJ	Army	19/04/24
CARTER PP	Army	
CARTLEDGE DG	Army	12/04/24
CHILDS T	Army	
DUNHILL JJ	Royal Navy	29/02/24
ELGAR F	Royal Navy	19/04/24
ENGLISH PY		
FLINTOFF SP		
FOSTER TJ	Army	15/03/24
GAUNT	EJ	15/11/23
GRAY J	Army	16/02/24
GRAY J	Army	
GWILLIAM R	Army	
HOLLIDAY HD		
KIELY J	Army	02/01/24
KILCOIN BL	Royal Air Force	02/01/23
LEWIS JP		12/04/24
LINCOLN II		
LOCKHART NJ	Army	09/03/24
MATTHEWS J	RAF	
MCCAFFERTY PM	Royal Navy	23/02/24
MILLARD IVS	Royal Air Force	03/03/24
MULLETT M	Army	04/04/24
PENN DT	Army	
POYNER DH	Royal Navy	22/04/24
PRITCHARD-DAVIES JE		18/04/24
REES J	Royal Navy	
RODDIS PJ	Army	03/03/21
ROWBOTTOM L		
SAUNDERS AB	Army	
SOMMERVILLE S		5/02/24
THOMAS J		
TOWNSON WF	Army	26/03/24
TUBB N		14/03/24
WATSON WG	Royal Air Force	30/03/24
WHITELEY NJ	Royal Navy	
WILSON AJ	Army	06/05/24
WILSON TH	Army	23/01/24

Useful contact numbers across the Association

TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
BLESMA SUPPORT OFFICERS			
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	Liz Watling	T 020 8548 7080	iwabenefits@blesma.org
BLESMA OUTREACH OFFICERS			
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 Cruddle	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
INDEPENDENCE AND WELLBEING			
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	goaexec@blesma.org
Membership, Branch and Volunteer Network Executive	Debbie Mayne	T 020 8548 7093	mbvexec@blesma.org
Welfare – Direct Line		T 020 8598 9459	
ACTIVITIES			
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
FUNDRAISING			
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
COMMUNICATIONS			
Digital Media Manager	Nick Tuck	T 01299 896282	digitalmedia@blesma.org
Blesma Magazine			editor@blesma.org
DIRECTORS			
Chief Executive	Vivienne Buck	T 020 8548 3512	ce@blesma.org
Operations Director	Tony Bloomfield	T 020 8548 3513	od@blesma.org
Acting Director Independence and Wellbeing	Colin Branch	T 020 8548 7090	hws@blesma.org
Finance and Support Director	Boston Mwense	T 020 8548 3518	fsd@blesma.org
USEFUL CONTACTS			
Main Office		T 020 8590 1124	info@blesma.org
BLESMA BRANCH OFFICIALS			
BOURNEMOUTH BRANCH			
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
GREAT YARMOUTH AND LOWESTOFT BRANCH			
Chair	Bob Monkhouse		chair.yarmouth@blesma.org
Secretary	Helen Cullen		secretary.yarmouth@blesma.org
Treasurer	Simon Cavie		treasurer.yarmouth@blesma.org
NOTTINGHAM BRANCH			
Chair	Andy Fitzgerald		chair.nottingham@blesma.org
Secretary	Dave Ledger		secretary.nottingham@blesma.org
Treasurer	Keith Meakin		treasurer.nottingham@blesma.org
SUTTON, MERTON & DISTRICT BRANCH			
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
SOUTHAMPTON BRANCH			
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).

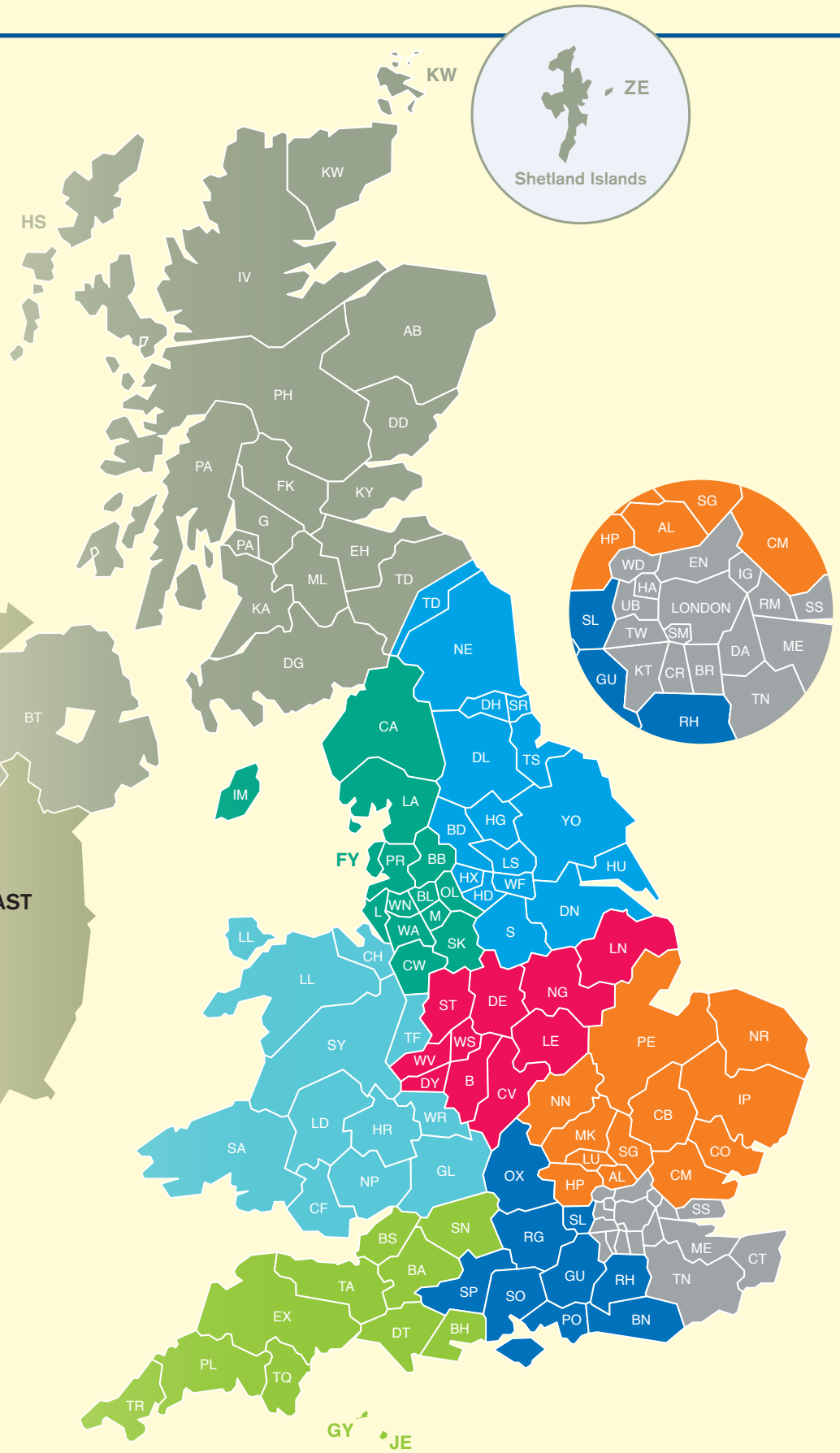
If you would like to send an email to a Branch official that is not related to Blesma activity, then personal contact information can still be used.



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



The Frontline Walk

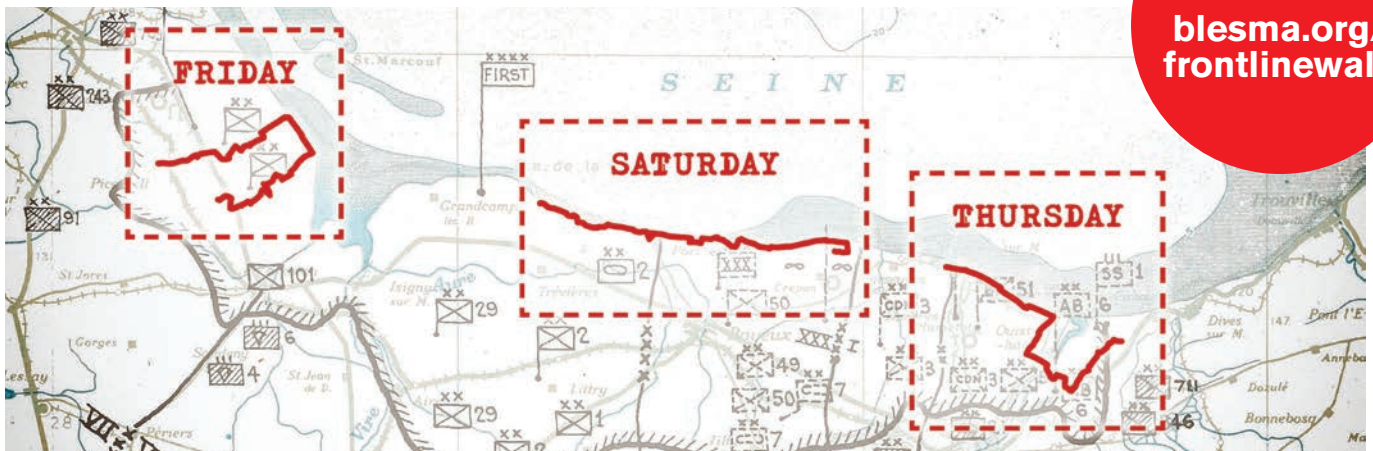


Commemorate the 80th anniversary of D-Day and take part in this 100KM walk through history.

 Normandy beaches

 2nd - 6th October 2024

THE CHALLENGE



Visit our website:
[blesma.org/
frontlinewalk](https://blesma.org/frontlinewalk)



Trek the famous Normandy route accompanied by a historian



Visit five D-Day landing sites and Pegasus Bridge



Pay your respects at the British Normandy Memorial

Registration fee: **£150**
Fundraising target: **£1,250**

Register now!

 020 8548 7087

 fundraising@blesma.org

 blesma.org/frontlinewalk

Return transport from London, accommodation, meals and snacks will all be provided.

Blesma
THE LIMBLESS VETERANS

THE FRONTLINE WALK
NORMANDY BEACHES

Army Benevolent Fund

Play the lottery in support of Blesma, The Limbless Veterans



Only
£1
a week

Guaranteed weekly cash prizes
plus a £500 rollover up to £25,000

An easy and
fun way to
support
Blesma!

*“Blesma was there
for me right from
the start.”*

Lionel O'Connor

WIN up to
£25,000

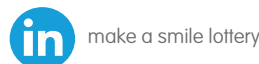
Play
once or
regularly
every
week



SCAN ME



to find out more!



You must be 18 or over to play make a smile lottery. Please play responsibly. Responsible gambling support: www.begambleaware.org. make a smile lottery is wholly owned by St Helena Hospice, a charity working with other charities to raise much needed funds. Promoter: St Helena Hospice trading as make a smile lottery. St Helena Hospice Limited is licensed and regulated in Great Britain by the Gambling Commission under account number 4685 www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk. St Helena Hospice is a company limited by guarantee. Registered in England and Wales Number 01511841. Registered Charity Number 280919. Registered Office: Myland Hall, Barncroft Close, Highwoods, Colchester, CO4 9JU. make a smile lottery office: 6 The Atrium, Phoenix Square, Wyncolls Road, Colchester, CO4 9AS. make a smile lottery Privacy Policy and Terms & Conditions can be viewed on our website.

