

Blesma

Bulletin Members' Newsletter Spring 2020

War Pensions
and allowances

New rates from April p20

How Blesma helps
future generations

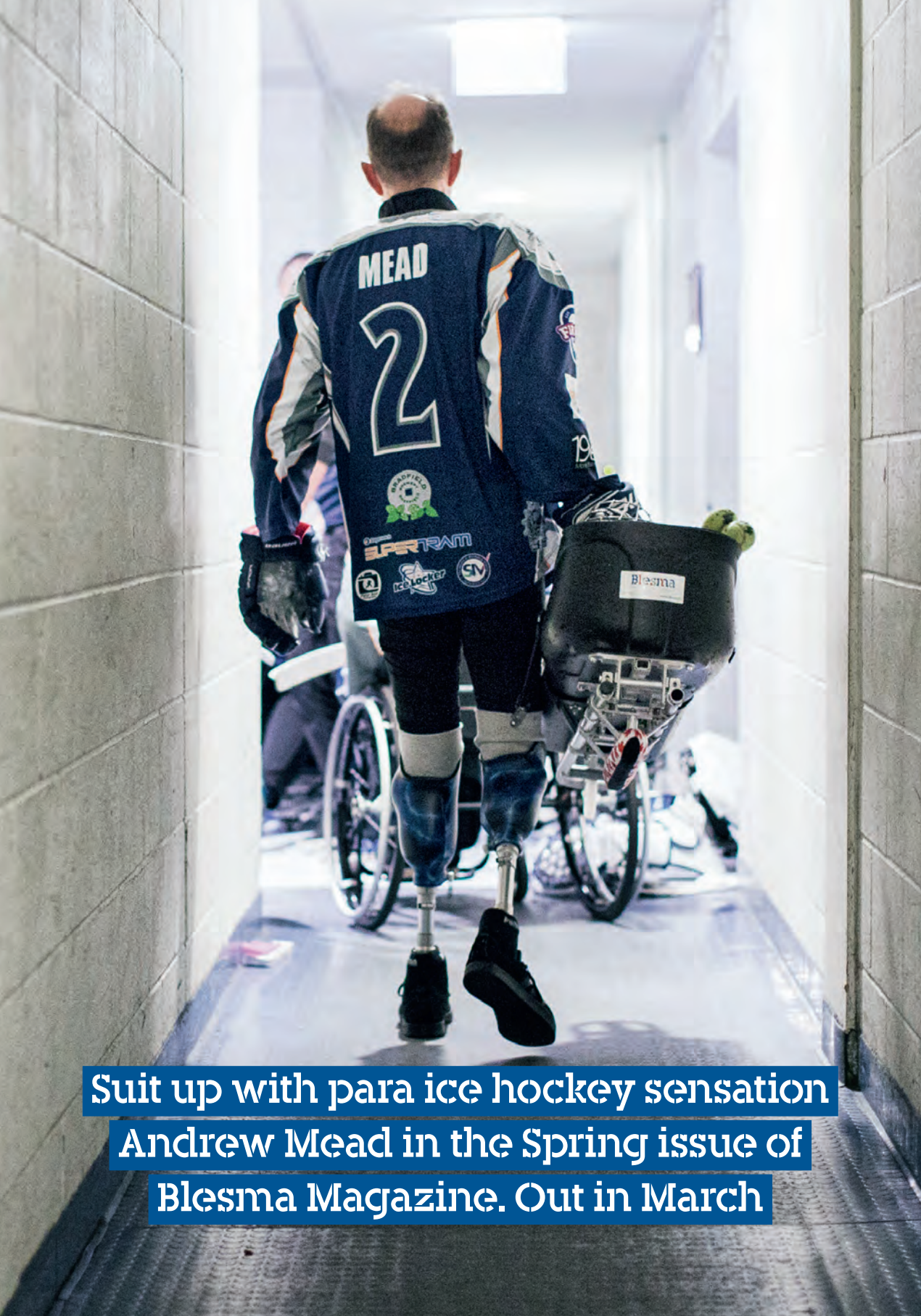
Supporting research p09



Get connected!

It's now easier than ever to keep in touch.
Download the Blesma Connects app today

Inside: **Could your family benefit from a Blesma Break?**



**Suit up with para ice hockey sensation
Andrew Mead in the Spring issue of
Blesma Magazine. Out in March**

Blesma Bulletin

Spring 2020



Dear Members,
It has been a huge privilege to stand in as the Association's Chief Executive for the past six months whilst the search by your Trustees for a successor to Barry Le Grys has been completed. The excellent news to report is that Colonel Jon Bryant OBE will be joining at

the end of March to take up the reins at Chelmsford. Jon joins us from his role as the Corps Colonel of the Army Air Corps, where he has delivered a wide range of support to serving personnel and veterans.

In a varied career, Jon has served in the Commando, Air Mobile and Air Assault brigades, and has led a variety of flying units in both peacetime and on operations. As a Trustee and Charity Chair, Jon has intimate knowledge and experience of governance, fundraising and service delivery to beneficiaries, all of which will serve him well in his executive role with the Association.

Once again, the *Bulletin* delivers an eclectic mix of articles with news, updates and features. You may have heard of the creation of the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA), which was formed late last year with Ministers Johnny Mercer and Oliver Dowden. It's early days for

the OVA but Blesma has already met with the head of the office to hear and help shape emerging thinking on how it might fulfil its remit to coordinate and drive government activity to support veterans.

Recently announced was the introduction of the Veterans Railcard with 30% off most fares, which can only help to improve connections for Members and is something we can all look forward to in the late Autumn.

January saw the release of the 2019 Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report which outlines how the Government has been fulfilling its responsibility to ensure the military community is not disadvantaged as a result of service. Of interest to Blesma is the aim to improve veterans' access to healthcare. You can read the full report at www.gov.uk/government/publications/armed-forces-covenant-annual-report-2019.

As part of our continued drive to widen and deepen our offer to the Membership, the Trustees have agreed to a new Outreach Officer to be based in Scotland. Members north of the border can expect to hear from Emma Gratton soon. Look out for more information on the Blesma Connects app and set yourself up with the means to strengthen your connection with fellow Members and the Blesma staff team.

Best wishes
Ian Waller



IN THIS ISSUE

BLESMA CONNECTS	04
SUPPORTING RESEARCH	09
AREA NEWS	10
BRANCH NEWS	13
ACTIVITIES	14
BENEFITS AND SOCIAL CARE	18
WAR PENSIONS AND ALLOWANCES	20
CONTACT DETAILS	22

Tap into the Association with Blesma Connects

Blesma has been at the forefront of connecting Members with one another for the best part of a century. From the very early days of championing medical treatment and rights, the ethos of the local Branches – where Members could meet with and help each other – has been central to Blesma’s thinking. The threads of connection and comradeship have run through the Association for a century, right up to the launch of the Blesma Connects app.

The free app, which is available to download and use on tablets and smartphones, will open up new channels of communication for Members, making it easier to organise local activities, contact your BSO and Outreach Officer, and keep in touch with the Association and each other.

The functionality and user journey have been designed so that you can access as much or as little of the service as you require. The app will energise the Activities experience, as you will be able to apply for an activity directly, meet others going on the same trip, discuss any plans with them or the Activities Team, and even share your experiences of previous events, so you can stay in touch with new-found friends.

Most importantly, Blesma Connects will help Members who have become socially isolated or



lonely, enabling them to build a support network. No-one understands a military person quite like a comrade, and those contacts can mean so much emotionally as well as practically.

Blesma wants all its Members to have access to everything the Association has to offer, including Blesma Connects. We know that not all of our Membership is confident online, which is why your local Outreach Officer will be organising some Blesma Connects Sessions near you soon. These sessions will help those who are not familiar with the internet to learn a little more about it, if they wish. Most importantly, whether you are

interested in the app or not, the Blesma Connects Sessions will offer a great opportunity to get together with other Members.

For those who have no access to a smartphone or tablet, there may be help available. Ask your Outreach Officer about ways Blesma could help you get online.

A flyer is enclosed inside this issue of the *Bulletin* which includes more details of the app’s functionality alongside some frequently asked questions.

If you require any further help or information about downloading or using Blesma Connects, please contact Blesma Chelmsford at app@blesma.org

“The free app will make it easier to contact your BSO and Outreach Officer, and keep in touch with each other”



Ken and Vera celebrate 75 years of marriage

In January, Blesma Member Kenneth Foster (97) and his wife Vera (92) celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary with a reception hosted by Sheffield's Lord Mayor, in the city's Town Hall.

Blesma organised the event to celebrate the couple's anniversary as they didn't have a honeymoon after their wedding. Attending the occasion was Captain Malcolm Birkett MBE of Burma Coy, who presented a Regimental cap badge plaque to acknowledge Ken's service in World War II.

Ken, a former Sheffield steel mill worker, was turned down when he tried to enlist, as his job was vital to the war effort. So he left his job and worked as a labourer before being accepted into the Highland Light Infantry and then the West Yorkshire Regiment.

While the Allied forces pressed home their attack after the D-Day landings near Bayeux, Ken sustained a life-changing injury when he was shot by anti-tank gunfire on Sword Beach during Operation Overlord. "I was taking instructions from a tank driver when we were hit. I was unlucky," recalls Ken.

Whilst recovering from his amputation in a field hospital, Ken only had thoughts for 18-year-old Vera. At the field hospital Ken's wound was dressed and then his leg was amputated. The Army



Padre wrote to Vera on Ken's behalf. "I was more worried about losing Vera than my leg!" Ken recalls as he was worried that Vera would rebuff him because of his amputation.

"Ken thought I would pack up with him because many injured men were receiving letters from wives or sweethearts leaving them. It's the man himself who counts, it doesn't matter what he loses," says former nursery nurse Vera.

When Vera went to visit Ken for Christmas in 1944, it surprised her that he had received a special licence to get married. "I knew we would wed at some point, so I agreed," said Vera. They married at St Cecilia's Church in Sheffield on 30 December 1944. After the ceremony, Ken returned to hospital.

Ken recalls that he didn't have much support when he returned home. "After my amputation I was given my crutches and told: 'Off you go'. You just got on with it in those days, but I didn't let it hold me back, and Blesma has always been there for me."

Ken battled workplace prejudice – common against injured veterans after WWII. It didn't deter him and he worked as a telephone engineer for 30 years, serving in the TA with the Corps of Royal Signals for 16 years. He and Vera raised three children; Zelda (now 73), Maurice (72) and Martin (65).

Now they are great-grandparents and enjoy holidays throughout the UK. "We can't go far these days, but we have each other, which is the main thing," said Ken.

Introducing Emma Gratton

OUTREACH OFFICER SCOTLAND



Tell us a bit about your work background...

When I left school in 1990, I joined the Army Intelligence Corps and served until 1997. I was posted to Northern Ireland and Hong Kong, as well as Abingdon and Aldershot, and completed a tour of the former Republic of Yugoslavia. I retrained

and became a Holistic Therapist, and later worked as a Project Manager in a variety of industries from recruitment to environmental consultancy. Eventually I became a dog walker and pet sitter – which was less stressful – and I also became involved with my local Veterans' Breakfast Club and Royal British Legion Scotland branch. During this time, I became aware of the Defence Medical Welfare Service (DMWS) and worked for them as a Welfare Officer in Ayrshire and Arran. I also worked on a project with veterans' charities before coming to Blesma.

What attracted you to working with Blesma?

Supporting and interacting with veterans appealed to me. I am familiar with the work Blesma does with the DMWS from my time in the Army. Also, I liked the fact that the Association focuses on doing what is right for its Members and offering a Member-led service, all of which inspired me to apply for the role.

What is the focus of your role?

My aim is to help and support Members to engage in their local communities as well as with each other throughout the whole of Scotland.

What do you like to do for fun?

I enjoy walking, camping, going to the theatre, meeting with friends and, although I only have two dogs now, I have been involved in sled dog racing with my Siberian huskies for almost 17 years. At one point I owned eight dogs and they all worked to varying degrees! Now the two I own have been retired so I am on the lookout for a new hobby – any suggestions would be gratefully received!

Pain Management Programme

The veteran-specific Pain Management Programme (PMP) teaches ways to manage pain more effectively. It has twice been rated as outstanding by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), while 93% of veterans who completed it gave it a five-star rating.

THE AIMS OF THE PMP ARE:

- To improve physical functioning and ability whilst reducing associated flare-ups
- To boost understanding of persistent pain conditions to help you make choices about your future pain management
- To reduce pain-related distress and behaviours that may be increasing and maintaining your distress and difficulties
- To review and reduce medication, and to develop ways to manage increases in pain

The programme consists of two four-day residential components and two single days over nine months. King Edward VII's Hospital will provide the assessment and treatment free of charge and will cover all reasonable travel costs, accommodation and meals. A GP referral along with 'Proof of Service' must be submitted before an assessment can be offered.

TO APPLY PLEASE CONTACT:

Email: veteranshealth@kingedwardvii.co.uk

Website: www.kingedwardvii.co.uk

Telephone: 020 7467 4370

Take the D-Day 44 Challenge this June

In 2009 Lieutenant Colonel Mike McErlain set up the D-Day 44 Challenge with his wife, Jo. Sadly, Mike died while doing the run on 06 June 2013, but with Jo's blessing the event will return on 06 June to raise money for Blesma and Combat Stress. Participants can choose to complete a 22-mile walk, 44-mile run, or 88-mile cycle along the Normandy coastline. Further details are on the Blesma website.

Big plans for the National Rehabilitation Centre

This is set to be a defining year for the National Rehabilitation Centre (NRC), which is a fundamental part of the wider Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre (DNRC) Programme.

From the outset, the DNRC Programme envisaged both a Defence clinical rehabilitation establishment for serving members of the Armed Forces and veterans referred by the NHS, as well as a similar facility for NHS patients (the National Rehabilitation Centre) on the same site.

The Defence facility – DNRC Stanford Hall – is located on the Stanford Hall Rehabilitation Estate near Loughborough. It was handed over in June 2018 as a gift to the nation and the MoD moved there, relocating from Headley Court in Surrey, and began treating patients in late 2018.

The focus now is on unlocking the opportunity for the National Rehabilitation Centre – potentially the first ever NHS facility of its type. The NRC will combine patient care, research and development, and training and education all under one roof. It will share knowledge, expertise and some specialist facilities with the Defence establishment to mutual advantage.

The process for delivering this NHS facility will be determined by the end of 2020. It involves

consultation and the approval of a business case; work that is being coordinated and led by Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust (NUH), the NHS sponsor, and ‘enabled’ by the DNRC Programme.

Planning permission is in place and the target for construction is to have the facility completed by the end of 2023.

NRC Programme Director Miriam Duffy is clear about the importance of making the National Rehabilitation Centre a reality.

“The NRC is about investing in the future of clinical rehabilitation and taking an opportunity to make a massive difference to the lives of people who suffer major trauma or serious illness,” she has said. “This year, we will be consulting on the proposals and finalising the business case. It is the most exciting initiative I have been involved with in more than 25 years in rehabilitation and trauma treatment, and I very much hope to see it benefiting patients as soon as possible.”



Supporting Research

As a respected organisation that supports the Service disabled, Blesma is often asked to support research projects. Every year, BSO (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier attends numerous meetings that look at future and on-going research topics. This offers an opportunity to represent Blesma and the Membership at the early or scoping phase of research projects, as well as influencing the direction of others.

When it does support projects, Blesma's input ranges from supporting the concept of the research to identifying possible participants. Before information about a project finds its way onto the Blesma website or social media channels, the Association asks a number of questions, such as; "What is the intended outcome and how might this benefit our Members?" or "How can Blesma or its Members help and what is the impact on participants?"

Blesma believes in evidence-based outcomes, and as such the Association's focus is to support projects that may make life better for Members and their families. The project with Anglia Ruskin University Veterans and Families Institute for Military Social Research; *Caring and Coping – A Family Perspective on Living with Limb Loss* is a good example. The Living with Limb Loss Support Model was developed from the



findings and is used as a tool in Blesma's work. It has also been widely distributed to statutory and Third Sector organisations, including the NHS and Defence Medical Services.

Blesma takes the safeguarding of Members and their information seriously. Whenever the Association gets a request for support, it asks for proof of ethical approval. This gives an assurance that the host university or professional body has carried out due diligence on the project proposal and agreed that the method(s) of research for that study are appropriate and safe.

Once this is confirmed, Blesma asks the requester to provide an outline and suitable information for use on social media and online. The Association then leaves it up to potential participants to make

contact directly with the research team, and Blesma will often have no further direct input. However, the Association may, from time to time, be asked to 'push' a study if uptake is low, details change, or deadlines grow close.

If you are interested in taking part in a future research project, please do keep an eye on the Blesma website and social media channels. Longer-term research projects may also be advertised through the *Bulletin* or in our magazine as not everyone uses the internet.

Watch this space for possible opportunities to get involved in research into Phantom Limb Pain, the use of spinal cord stimulation to reduce or eliminate pain, and the effects of combat injuries on body image and relationships.

News from the Outreach Officers

PROVIDING SKILLS TRAINING TO PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANISATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND)

Members William Curran and Robert Maxwell have volunteered to help qualified allied health professionals, experienced physiotherapists and occupational therapists develop their skills in Equine Facilitated Therapy.

This exciting pilot course enabled participants to learn new skills and increase their body awareness using horses. This exercise positively challenged volunteers and therapists alike; both William and Robert provided excellent feedback and despite the activity being out of their comfort zones, they took on the challenge and exceeded the expectations of the therapists.

Elsewhere, five Blesma Members volunteered as casualties in a live multi-agency (emergency services) exercise. The Members provided a different dynamic and dimension for the agencies taking part, using limb loss and loss of use of limb to challenge and test the response team's ability.

Members who are interested in volunteering for this activity should be aware that if you become uncomfortable during the exercise or decide not to participate on the day, it can be stopped. For further details please contact Outreach Officer Fiona Morrison.



BLESMA EXHIBIT AT THE BIRMINGHAM TATTOO (MIDLANDS)

Outreach Officer Vanessa Lucas joined the exhibitors at the Birmingham International Tattoo, Britain's biggest annual indoor display of spectacular military bands and pipers. "It was an opportunity to spread awareness about the great work of Blesma

and to meet other charities," she said. One of the new connections Vanessa made was with the Women's Fellowship, who wish to support Blesma by booking a talk with Outreach Officer West Jason Suller.

Supporting Vanessa on the busy stand were Members Lee Bagley and Phil and Kay Coombes, who helped bring in a healthy £263.13 for the Association from donations and merchandise sales.

WHEELCHAIR RUGBY (NORTH WEST)

Following an amputation in 2018, rugby-loving Member Bob Thornthwaite has carried on with his favourite sport. Being active is important to Bob, and through



the Outreach programme, he was introduced to Leyland Warriors Wheelchair Rugby League team and attended a training session.

Since that introduction last September, Bob has become a regular in the squad. "I love being back in a team and playing rugby. I'm getting good at it now, too," Bob said. He also still goes to the gym three times a week and successfully applied to be part of the support team for the upcoming Blesma event Race Across America 2020. If you are interested in trying wheelchair rugby, contact your Outreach Officer or check the Blesma Connects app.

DIGITAL INCLUSION UPDATE (NORTHERN IRELAND)

Exciting times in Northern Ireland as Members gathered to take their first look at the Blesma Connects app. Outreach Officer Fiona Morrison organised the session with the aim of not only getting Members using the app, but getting them together in real life!

The session and the app both received positive feedback, in person and online. One Member was unable to get online initially, however with help and guidance from Fiona they are now making full use of the app. Contact your Outreach Officer to find out about Blesma Connects Sessions near you!



POTTERY SESSIONS (WEST)

Blesma Members in the West recently had a great day learning new skills at Eastnor Pottery in Ledbury, with Outreach Officer Jason Suller. Welfare Rep and Blesma Member Chris Jones thoroughly enjoyed

AREA NEWS

the creative activity as it's been 30 years since he first tried pottery. During his session on the pottery wheel Chris, who enjoys meeting up with other Members at Outreach events throughout the year, made a breakfast bowl and is now considering taking up pottery as a hobby!

HANNAH BLYTHYN MEETS MEMBERS (WALES)

Welsh Assembly Member and Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government Hannah Blythyn visited the Wrexham Limb Centre in January. The Minister is the lead in Wales for Armed Forces and Veterans and was invited by Tom Hall, Blesma Support Officer Wales and West, to meet Blesma Members, their families and carers.

The visit aimed to draw attention to, and discuss, the issues that amputees and their carers face.

As well as meeting Tom and Outreach Officer Jason Suller, the Minister met Member Anthony Coleman Jones who was accompanied by his three daughters and granddaughter, and who made an immediate impression on Ms Blythyn. Anthony told the Minister how difficult it had been for him after his leg amputation in 2019.

"The local authority was difficult regarding housing and the process of getting appropriately adapted housing was extremely slow," Anthony told Ms Blythyn. "It was hard to get anyone to listen to my problems but having Blesma to



support me and my daughters was the key to my recovery and I've finally settled into my new home."

Member Shaun Stocker spoke about the work of Wrexham Artificial Limb and Appliance Centre (ALAC). "My prosthetists are truly amazing and so is

Wrexham ALAC," he said. "They always listen to my needs. I think I'm the only amputee at the centre who has had osseointegration surgery, so sometimes we come across issues and adjustments that are new territory for us all, but nothing phases the team

here and they welcome the challenges.

"It is important for patients to feel like they are respected and listened to, as it can sometimes feel like no one understands. The life of amputees can be lonely, but those feelings don't exist at Wrexham. I am proud to be a patient at



Wrexham ALAC, and really and truly value the work that everyone here does.”

The group was made up of both war pensioners and non-service-attributable amputees from across the generations and everyone was glad to have the chance to highlight some of the struggles they face in Wales, particularly regarding support with accessing housing, using public transport, and navigating the NHS.

Tom briefed the Minister on the work that Blesma carries out in Wales and brought to her attention some of the complex issues that amputees face. Members also talked with the Minister about the differences in prosthetic provision and the issues of funding prosthetics in Wales. They spoke about the wider difficulties they face as amputees and how hard it has been to overcome them. They also highlighted the role of Blesma in their lives and spoke about its positive impact and the strong relationships they have built up with their BSO and Outreach Officers, all of which interested the Minister.

Members John Kemp and Afghanistan veteran Phil Meadows described the way they cope with pain and the limited treatment available to manage it, explaining that Blesma’s support is invaluable. The day then ended with a tour of the Wrexham Limb Centre by Manager Stephen Jones and Team Leader Katie Davies.

Tom and Jason gave a Blesma hoodie to the Minister as a thank you and Ms Blythyn was given an open invitation to attend a Blesma West Members lunch or even to engage in a Blesma activity during the year.

News from across the Branches



PORTSMOUTH BRANCH

Long-standing Portsmouth Branch President Heather Priseman has been rewarded for her services to Blesma with the presentation of the ‘City of Portsmouth’ shield.

The award was presented by the Lord Mayor of Portsmouth David Fuller and Lady Mayoress Mrs Leza Tremorin, who were guests of honour at the Portsmouth Branch Christmas Lunch at the Brookfield Hotel, Emsworth.

The raffles raised a healthy amount with an array of great prizes. Social Secretary Sheila Brown and Honorary Secretary Jan Cantledge were praised for organising such an enjoyable lunch; 70 Members attended, including guests from the Southampton Branch.

Sadly, Heather is stepping down from her role due to ill health, she will be sorely missed by the Branch Members. Everyone at the Portsmouth Branch would like to convey their sincerest thanks to

Heather and her husband Peter for the time and support they have given to Blesma over the years.

Should any Blesma Member wish to join the Portsmouth Branch please contact Sheila Brown (Branch Secretary) on 07733 102364

BOURNEMOUTH BRANCH

**SAVE THE DATE FOR
2020 MEETINGS**

Monday 06 April AGM

11 am at the War Memorial Homes (Bournemouth)

Monday 01 June

11 am at Poundbury (Dorchester) followed by lunch (TBC)

Monday 07 September

11 am at the War Memorial Homes (Bournemouth)

Monday 02 November

11 am at the War Memorial Homes (Bournemouth)

All Members are welcome to the meetings held at The Bournemouth War Memorial Homes, Castle Lane, BH8 9TP

Would you benefit from a Blesma Break?

Taking a break from our routine, even for a couple of days, can do wonders for our wellbeing. But some of us might feel unable to take a break due to concerns about accessibility, the logistics of travelling, or cost.

Perhaps you and your partner might benefit from a break, or you feel that a break as a family may be useful. Whatever your situation, if you are having difficulty finding somewhere that can provide the specialist support you might need, or you feel it is unaffordable, Blesma may be able to help.

We also understand that partners and carers sometimes need a break too. Blesma may be able to support you with this, including helping you arrange care for your loved one while you are away. To find out more about the Blesma Break criteria, please contact your BSO. Their details can be found on p22.



A few activities coming soon



FAMILIES GLAMPING WEEKEND

Where: Brampton, Cumbria

When: 15-19 August

Application deadline: 15 May

Get to know other Members and their families, and share in some of the friendships that our Members enjoy whilst being in the great outdoors. Spouses, partners, carers, children and grandchildren are all welcome. Why not find out more and apply for your place via the Blesma Connects app?



BATTLEFIELD TOUR

Where: Ypres, Belgium

When: 30 July - 04 August

Application deadline: 01 April

Flanders has been a place of pilgrimage since The Great War took the lives of more than three quarters of a million British men.

This poignant guided tour provides an opportunity for Members to visit a number of important memorial sites to pay their respects – from Tyne Cot Cemetery to the Somme and beyond – while gaining a richer understanding of the history and events of WWI. This is one of the most significant events in the Blesma calendar. You can apply for your place via the Blesma Connects app.

Back on the slopes thanks to Blesma

In 2015 blind veteran Jamie Weller, who has represented Great Britain as an Alpine ski racer, was involved in a crash on the slopes that left him fearful to return to the snow. But thanks to support from Blesma and his Disabled Sports USA ski instructor, Jamie has rebuilt his confidence.

“I had a bad accident four years ago while training in Austria,” says Jamie. “I hit an ice wall and was taken to hospital with my face and chin split open to the bone. Being visually impaired, I need a guide in front of me and use a Bluetooth headset in my helmet for them to give me directions. That stopped working so I had no idea which direction I was going in before I hit the wall. I haven’t been Alpine skiing since.”

Jamie returned to the slopes with 11 fellow Members in December during Blesma’s annual Ski Spectacular in Colorado, USA. The event, run by Disabled Sports USA, is one of the world’s biggest and best ski spectaculars for adaptive winter sports. Mono ski, snowboarding, stand-up ski, and 3-track are all available.

“It was a confidence builder to get back out there. By the end of the week, I’d largely got back to where I was some years ago,” Jamie says.

“Some of the guys had never skied before, and it was amazing to hear them talk about their experiences and how they were progressing.

“We skied for about six hours each day. The weather was superb with beautiful snow conditions – we couldn’t have wished for better. I think skiing is a very important aid to people who have lost their sight or mobility, as it can really build confidence. If I can ski down a mountain, then I can certainly walk down the high street with my guide dog Freddie!

“One evening a fancy dress party took place in the hotel. The guys all dazzled our American hosts by dressing up as 80s celebrities. Craig Gadd went as Mr. T and Nicky Maxwell was Maverick from *Top Gun*. I got into the spirit and went as Madonna in a pink wig and joined Andy Grant as The Fonz. I don’t think I have ever laughed so much in one week!

“On my return home my mobility had improved, mainly due to the confidence I had acquired during the week. My message to Members would be to just go for it. I really enjoyed the trip – you have the mountains and the sunshine, and everyone’s laughing. What’s not to love?

“If anyone has any doubts about going skiing, then they should consider the Blesma ski trips. The activity has made me want to carry on with Alpine skiing. I love the feeling of being on a mountain, and skiing is such an amazing sport. It’s good for mental health too as it focuses your mind on something physical as opposed to dwelling on things. Good job Blesma and thanks to the Disabled Sports USA ski instructors!”

This year’s Ski Spectacular takes place from 05-15 December (TBC) in Colorado, USA. It is the perfect week to have fun on the slopes and

learn new skills while building confidence and enjoying all that the Ski Spectacular has to offer. Most abilities can be catered for on the slopes. This and other activities can be applied for via the new Blesma Connects app. The deadline for applications is 01 August.



My life-changing horse riding trip in Arizona

Michelle Murphy, a Blesma Member who took part in the Arizona horseback activity during which she learnt about ranch life and went on horse riding trails, has said that the activity – her first with the Association – has “changed my life.”

Michelle served in the Royal Corps of Signals for 22 years and was working as camp staff at the North West Reserve Forces’ and Cadets’ Association Altcar Training Camp on Merseyside when she contracted the flesh-eating disease Necrotising Fasciitis, which resulted in her losing a leg.

Michelle’s introduction to Blesma was through her former training Colonel who contacted her to inform her that Blesma could provide some of the help and support she required. “It was just what I needed, and I thought I would give Blesma a try,” Michelle said. “I loved horse riding as a child, which is why I applied for the Blesma horseback trip. I didn’t think in my wildest dreams that I would be picked to go.”

She embarked on the adventure, met the group, “and within 10 minutes it felt as if I had known them for years. They were all a good laugh and very supportive,” she said. Allan Jackson a fellow Member on the trip had the same amputation as Michelle (right leg, through-knee) so could relate



to the difficulties she was experiencing. “I was so impressed with Allan’s prosthetic but didn’t realise, until talking to him, that I could possibly try one too. My NHS leg is uncomfortable and causes me to fall over frequently, which means I don’t manage to get out much,” said Michelle.

The one-week trip to Arizona consisted of learning all things equine. “Everything

about horses was covered; from how to groom them to saddling up,” said Michelle. During the trip, the group stayed on several ranches, including one high up in the mountains. “We learnt about herding cattle, which was a bit scary but good fun – especially watching the cowboys lassoing the cows.”

Michelle experienced challenges and admitted she

had to push herself and get out of her comfort zone. She had to swap horses halfway through the trip as her first was a “bit lively”. Her second horse, Billy, had a calmer temperament which meant she was able to ride out to the desert with the other Members, which proved to be an exciting experience. “It was amazing! I had to pinch myself as I couldn’t believe I was there. I loved it,” she said.

Michelle keeps in regular contact with the group as they all bonded so well. “I want to thank Blesma



Carol King's Blesma Winter Ski Experience

for my life-changing trip to Arizona," she said. "Before I was picked to go, I was struggling mentally, emotionally and physically, and had even contemplated suicide. All the people from the trip treated me so well. The laughs and banter were a tonic and all the advice was invaluable."

Since returning to the UK, Michelle has seen her prosthetics specialist and is trialling a microprocessor prosthetic. "I'm so excited to try the new prosthetic and I have had great support," said Michelle. If the four-week trial is successful she will receive a bespoke prosthetic leg.

Michelle's new-found confidence has not only given her the determination to return to work and take up boxing again, but she has also applied for nine Blesma activities this year! She is keen to try sailing and would like to be considered for the ambitious Borneo Expedition. "Blesma should be very proud of the work that it does, the Association helped save my life. I'm sure there are many people like me who feel the same," said Michelle.

Blesma's BSO (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier, says: "Blesma has joined with others representing the limb loss community in England as many of our Members are living with limb loss for reasons not directly related to their military service. We are delighted that some of our Associate Members may now be able to benefit from microprocessor-controlled knees in the same way that many veterans from recent conflicts have whilst at Headley Court.

"It is clear that our veterans have shown how life changing prosthetics can be and this, in turn, has influenced the debate and helped to bring about this decision."

If you require any information, help or advice about prosthetics you should contact your BSO (contact details can be found on p22) or Brian Chenier BSO (Prosthetics) on 020 8548 7080 or by email at bsoprosthetics@blesma.org

18-26 JANUARY

In January I arrived at La Plagne, France for my first Blesma ski experience. My ski instructors were Blesma Members John Reeve and Niall Healy who I had worked with before, so that was great, even though they had to keep pushing us up the hill each time, which was hard going for them!

Despite finding the activity very challenging and feeling very nervous, I felt much better after an encouraging chat with John, and my first day ended on a good note!

There was a small obstacle course so we could practise our turns and stops. I learnt a technique that helps you off the mountain safely, which involves sliding down the mountain sideways!

After mastering the chair lifts, we progressed to the Green Slope. I managed to get the skis on the lift after a few attempts. As this slope was wider and longer it was easier to manage. The après ski was with bobsleighs from the 1992 Winter Olympics. You could reach speeds of up to 80km around the track in just 90 seconds, which blew my mind! However, we were safe in our caged sleighs and I had a brilliant experience! It was a once-in-a-lifetime adventure for me.

One morning, I went out on the ski taxi and I saw the beautiful mountains and took in my surroundings. That evening I got to do the Super Tyro zip wire – I had to jump off a platform and zip to the other side of the resort, it was so much fun. What a day!

The whole team worked hard in supporting me when I found activities hard physically and mentally. With encouragement from the instructors, I became more confident over time, not forgetting the support from other Blesma Members. Spending time with fellow Member Janet Riddell helped too – we overcame our fears with laughter!

Thank you so much Blesma, I had an awesome time and an amazing week!

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. If you would like to discuss your benefit entitlement or have a social care query, please contact your Blesma Support Officer (details on p22). Alternatively, you can contact Liz Watling in the Independence and Wellbeing Team by email at iwabenefits@blesma.org or by calling her on 020 8548 3516.

BENEFIT RATES FROM APRIL 2020

For the previous four years, most working age benefits have been kept at their 2015/16 cash value. This did not affect disability, carers and pensioner benefits, which saw a yearly increase. Due to the general election, last year's Autumn Budget was cancelled. The Government had previously announced that there would be an end to the freeze in payment. There is a Spring Budget planned for 11 March 2020 and the Government policy will be confirmed then. We will update Members in the Summer issue of the *Bulletin*.

Disability, carers and pensioner benefits are set to rise from April 2020. Anyone claiming these benefits should receive an award letter sometime in March advising them of their new entitlement.

NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE

The hourly rate for the national minimum wage depends on your age and whether you are an apprentice. The hourly national minimum wage will increase by between 4.6% and 6.5% in April 2020 to:

- Apprentices: £4.15
- Under 18s: £4.55
- 18-20 year olds: £6.45
- 21-24 year olds: £8.20
- Over 25 year olds: £8.72 (this is known as the national living wage)

Apprentices are entitled to the minimum wage for their age if they are both:

- Aged 19 or over
- Have completed the first year of their apprenticeship

BLIND PERSON'S ALLOWANCE

Most people have a tax allowance. This is the amount you can earn before you start paying income tax. The Blind Person's Allowance is an extra amount that can be added on to a person's tax-free allowance. For the tax year 2019, this allowance was set at £2,450. We will update our Members in the Summer issue of the *Bulletin*, as the Government will confirm the 2020 tax allowance in the Spring Budget.

You can transfer your Blind Person's Allowance to your spouse or civil partner if you don't pay tax or cannot use all of it.

ENGLAND AND WALES

You can claim Blind Person's Allowance if you:

- Are registered with your local council as being blind or severely sight impaired
- Have a certificate that says you are blind or severely sight impaired (or have a similar document from your doctor)

SCOTLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

You can claim Blind Person's Allowance if you:

- Cannot carry out work for which eyesight is essential
- You have a certificate that says you are blind or severely sight impaired (or have a similar document from your doctor)

Contact Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to claim.

Telephone: 0300 200 3301

Monday to Friday: 8am-8pm

Saturday: 8am-4pm

MOTABILITY

Motability is an independent charity set up to help people with disabilities use one of the following qualifying benefits to improve their mobility:

- enhanced rate of Personal Independence Payment mobility component
- higher rate of Disability Living Allowance mobility component

WAR PENSIONER'S MOBILITY SUPPLEMENT

Armed Forces Independence Payment

The scheme offers cars on lease (including cars adapted to carry a driver or passenger seated in their wheelchair), powered wheelchairs and mobility scooters. To use the Motability Scheme the qualifying benefit must have at least 12 months still to run. The Department for Work and Pensions or Veterans UK will make the payment of the qualifying benefit direct to Motability.

Whilst the vast majority of Motability Scheme customers use just their mobility allowance to lease the vehicle they require, there are still some who are unable to access the benefits of the Motability Scheme as they are unable to afford adaptations or driving lessons. Some of the more expensive cars also require an advance payment. Motability can offer grants to support people on a qualifying benefit to access the scheme.

If you would like to find out more about the Motability Scheme please visit their website www.motability.co.uk or speak to your Blesma Support Officer.

HOW TO ACCESS SOCIAL CARE

Social care is the term used to describe care and support provided to enable people to manage their daily living tasks. This includes supporting people with physical, mental and learning disabilities.

Care and support can be provided in a number of ways including:

- Equipment and adaptations to your home
- Attending a day care centre
- Care at home
- Care in a residential home

Healthcare is centrally organised by the Government, whilst local authorities administer social care. You can contact your local authority, which will carry out an assessment of your needs, usually by a social worker, occupational therapist or other qualified professional. There is usually a means-tested charging assessment, as unlike the NHS, social care is not free at the point of delivery.

The means test works out whether:

- The local authority pays the full cost of your care
- The local authority pays some of the costs and you pay the rest
- You pay for all of your care

What is charged for depends on whether you live in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales. If you prefer, you can contact a care agency directly that can complete an assessment of your needs. You will then have to pay for the full cost of any care you have arranged privately.

In some situations, social care and support is provided by the NHS instead of your local authority. In this instance it is free. This can include:

- Short-term care after leaving hospital in order for you to prepare to manage independently at home. This is sometimes known as reablement.
- Care if you have a complex and serious health condition. This is known as continuing healthcare.

WAR PENSION DISREGARD FOR SOCIAL CARE CHARGING ASSESSMENTS

As mentioned above, when people have a local authority social care assessment, they may be expected to have a financial assessment to calculate their contribution towards their care costs.

BENEFITS AND SOCIAL CARE

In April 2017, the Government changed the way that the War Pension is treated as income within the charging calculation. For those living in England, Scotland and Wales, War Pension is now disregarded as income when calculating a person's charge towards their care. There is yet to be an announcement from the Northern Ireland government.

As April is the time of year when local authorities write to people to advise them of their updated contribution towards their care costs, this is a timely reminder to make sure that, if you receive a War Pension, it has not been included within the assessment. However, please note that Constant Attendance Allowance can be treated as income.

If you do identify that your War Pension is still being treated within the assessment, please contact your local authority. If this is not resolved, please contact your Blesma Support Officer.

INCREASES IN WAR PENSIONS AND ALLOWANCES - EFFECTIVE WEEK BEGINNING 06 APRIL 2020

The new rates of War Pensions and Allowances proposed from April 2020 are set out in the following tables. The annual uprating will take effect from the week beginning 06 April 2020. Rates for 2020 are increasing by 1.7% in line with the September 2019 Consumer Prices Index. These are weekly rates unless otherwise shown.

WAR PENSION	CURRENT	APRIL 2020
100%	£189.80	£193.00
90%	£170.82	£173.70
80%	£151.84	£154.40
70%	£132.86	£135.10
60%	£113.88	£115.80
50%	£94.90	£96.50
40%	£75.92	£77.20
30%	£56.94	£57.90
20%	£37.96	£38.60

The actual amounts paid may vary slightly from this due to the impact of the various component-level rounding rules.

AGE ALLOWANCES PAYABLE FROM AGE 65

40% or 50%	£12.70	£12.90
60% or 70%	£19.55	£19.90
80% or 90%	£27.80	£28.25
100%	£39.10	£39.80

CONSTANT ATTENDANCE ALLOWANCE

Part Day Rate	£35.80	£36.40
Full Day Rate	£71.60	£72.80
Intermediate Rate	£107.40	£109.20
Exceptional Rate	£143.20	£145.60

INVALIDITY ALLOWANCE

Lower Rate	£7.55	£7.70
(Retired between 50 & 54 (women) and 50 & 59 (men) years of age inclusive)		
Middle Rate	£15.10	£15.40
(Retired between 40 & 49 years of age inclusive)		
Higher Rate	£23.20	£23.60
(Retired under 40 years of age)		

CLOTHING ALLOWANCE

£ per annum	£245.00	£249.00
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EDUCATION ALLOWANCE

Maximum - £ per annum	£120.00	£120.00
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MOBILITY SUPPLEMENT

One Rate	£68.35	£69.50
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ALLOWANCE FOR LOWERED STANDARD OF OCCUPATION

Maximum	£71.60	£72.80
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UNEMPLOYABILITY ALLOWANCE

Personal	£117.30	£119.30
Adult Dependency Increase	£65.20	£66.30
Increase for First Child	£15.15	£15.40
Increase for Subsequent Children	£17.80	£18.10

COMFORTS ALLOWANCE

(PAID WITH CAA AND UNSUPP)

Lower Rate	£15.40	£15.55
Higher Rate	£30.80	£31.10

EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE DISABLEMENT ALLOWANCE

One Rate	£71.60	£72.80
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SEVERE DISABLEMENT OCCUPATIONAL ALLOWANCE

One Rate	£35.80	£36.40
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WAR WIDOW(ER)'S PENSION

Widow(er) (Other Ranks)	£143.95	£146.40
Childless Widow(er) Under 40 (Other Ranks)	£34.48	£35.07
Supplementary Pension (Pre-1973 Widows)	£96.31	£97.95

WAR WIDOW(ER)'S AGE ALLOWANCE

Age 65-69	£16.40	£16.70
Aged 70-79	£31.55	£32.10
Aged 80 and over	£46.80	£47.60

CHILDREN'S ALLOWANCE

Increase for First Child	£22.60	£23.00
Increase for Subsequent Children	£25.30	£25.55

RENT ALLOWANCE

Maximum	£54.20	£55.10
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THERAPEUTIC EARNINGS LIMIT

Annual Rate	£6,838.00	£7,270.00
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ATTENDANCE ALLOWANCE

Lower Rate	£58.70	£59.70
Higher Rate	£87.65	£89.15

NEW EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY - FORCES FAMILIES JOBS

Since launching in September 2019, Forces Families Jobs has grown from strength to strength and now has more than 3,500 'Forces friendly' job vacancies online. This groundbreaking website, which is free to use, links leading employers who have signed the Armed Forces Covenant and who wish to support Forces families by offering employment to military family members looking for work.

So if you are a military family member (partner, son or daughter aged 18-25) or are in your first year of transitioning out of the Armed Forces, then Forces Families Jobs can help.

World-leading employers including Microsoft, Morrisons, the Scottish Government, and a vast range of small- and medium-sized businesses are now actively using Forces Families Jobs. Different jobs are added daily, so if you can't find what you are looking for then please register to receive alerts for the right role.

For more information visit the Forces Families Jobs website at www.forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk

Useful contact numbers across the Association

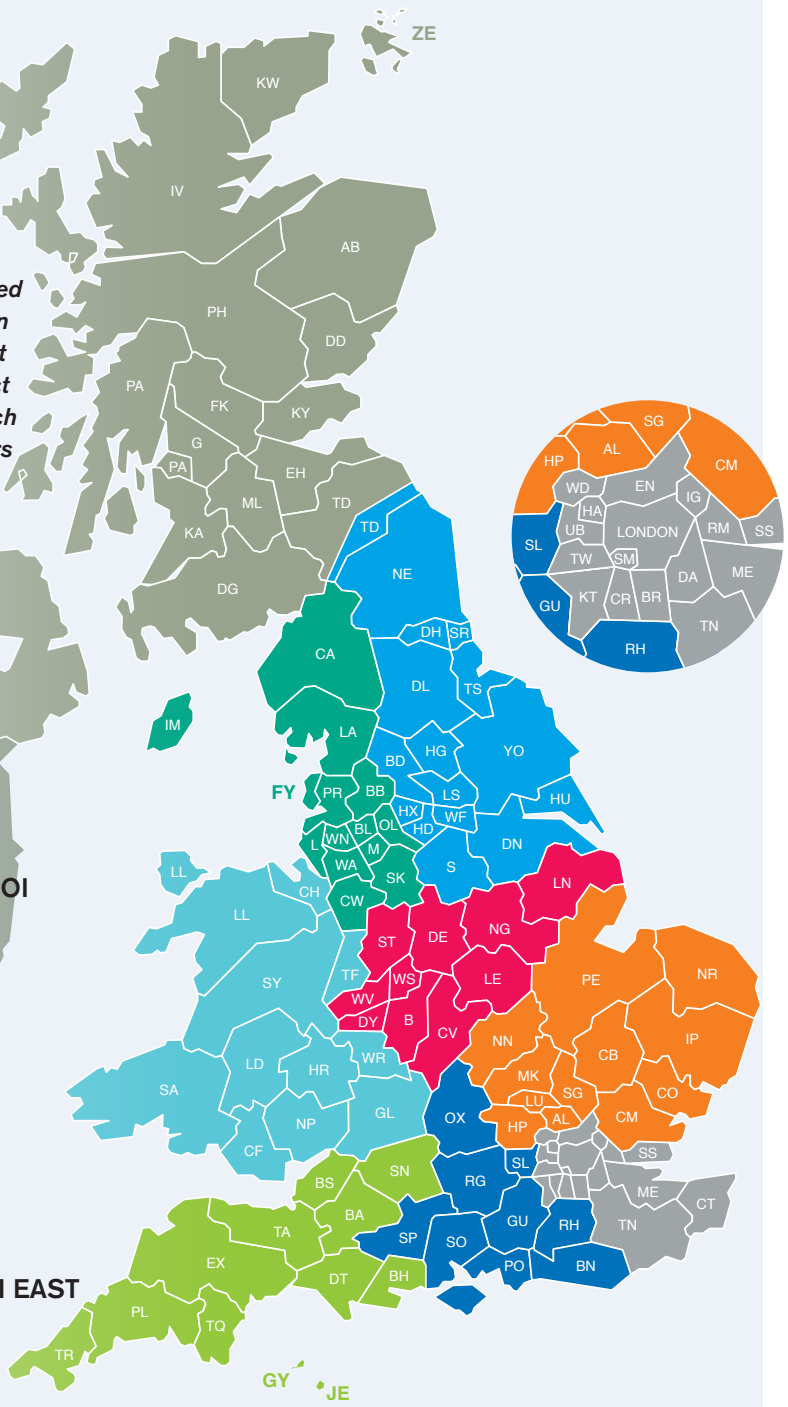
TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
BLESMA SUPPORT OFFICERS			
BSO (Prosthetics)	Brian Chenier	020 8548 7080 07796 715908	bsoprosthetics@blesma.org
BSO Eastern	Kevin Long	020 3954 3020 07825 536364	bsoeastern@blesma.org
BSO London & South East	Paul Findlay	01268 415290 07469 242277	bsolse@blesma.org
BSO Midlands	Sam Wileman	020 8548 7095 07825 536363	bsomid@blesma.org
BSO North East	Pete Shields	01469 532176 07908 667219	bsone@blesma.org
BSO North West	Mike Downes	01257 795144 07825 536362	bsonw@blesma.org
BSO Scotland, NI & ROI	Steve Burton	07766 258461	bsosniroi@blesma.org
BSO South	Pat Donnachie	020 3954 3026 07741 846106	bsosouth@blesma.org
BSO South West	Steve Fraser	01278 789393 07788 312747	bsosw@blesma.org
BSO West	Tom Hall	020 8548 7098 07780 165085	bsowest@blesma.org
Members Living Overseas	Liz Watling	020 8548 3516	iwabenefits@blesma.org
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National Outreach Coordinator	Martin Gwillim	07741 891632	outreachcoord@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Eastern	Darren Fuller	07741 661159	outreache@blesma.org
Outreach Officer London & South East	Jess Linge	07741 845793	outreachlse@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Midlands	Vanessa Lucas	07741 845429	outreachmid@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Northern Ireland	Fiona Morrison	07741 744617	outreachni@blesma.org
Outreach Officer North East	Adele Miller	07741 847211	outreachne@blesma.org
Outreach Officer North West	Kirsten Morrissey	07741 846674	outreachnw@blesma.org

TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
BLESMA OUTREACH OFFICERS Cont			
Outreach Officer Scotland	Emma Gratton	07884 695703	outreachscotland@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South	Andy Barlow	07384 834449	outreachsouth@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South West	Sarah Payne	07741 737563	outreachsw@blesma.org
Outreach Officer West	Jason Suller	07741 744141	outreachw@blesma.org
INDEPENDENCE AND WELLBEING			
Members Support	Liz Watling	020 8548 3516	iwabenefits@blesma.org
Members Admin	Elaine Hems	020 8548 7093	memberadmin@blesma.org
Grants Admin	Susie Grainger	020 3954 3022	grantsadmin@blesma.org
Welfare – Direct Line		020 8598 9459	
ACTIVITIES			
Activities Manager	Jess March	020 8548 3519	activities@blesma.org
Membership Engagement Officer	Emily Mizon	020 8548 7094	meo@blesma.org
Activities Executive	Clare Wellings	020 3954 3021	ae@blesma.org
FUNDRAISING			
Associate Director of Fundraising	Tony Bloomfield	020 8548 3517	adfundraising@blesma.org
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Corporate Partnership Manager	Mike Allen	020 3954 3029	corporate@blesma.org
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Digital Media Manager	Nick Tuck	01299 896282	digitalmedia@blesma.org
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Interim Chief Executive	Ian Waller	020 8548 3513	od@blesma.org
Operations Director	Ian Waller	020 8548 3513	od@blesma.org
Director Independence and Wellbeing	Heather Betts	020 8548 3515	diw@blesma.org
USEFUL CONTACTS			
Main Office		020 8590 1124	info@blesma.org
Office and Facilities Manager	Paula Ferreira	020 8548 3511	officeandfacilities@blesma.org
Admin Support	Sue Stokes	020 8548 7091	officeexec@blesma.org

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 p22.

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



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