

# Blesma

Bulletin Members' Newsletter Winter 2020

You can get so  
much out of giving  
The view of a volunteer p09

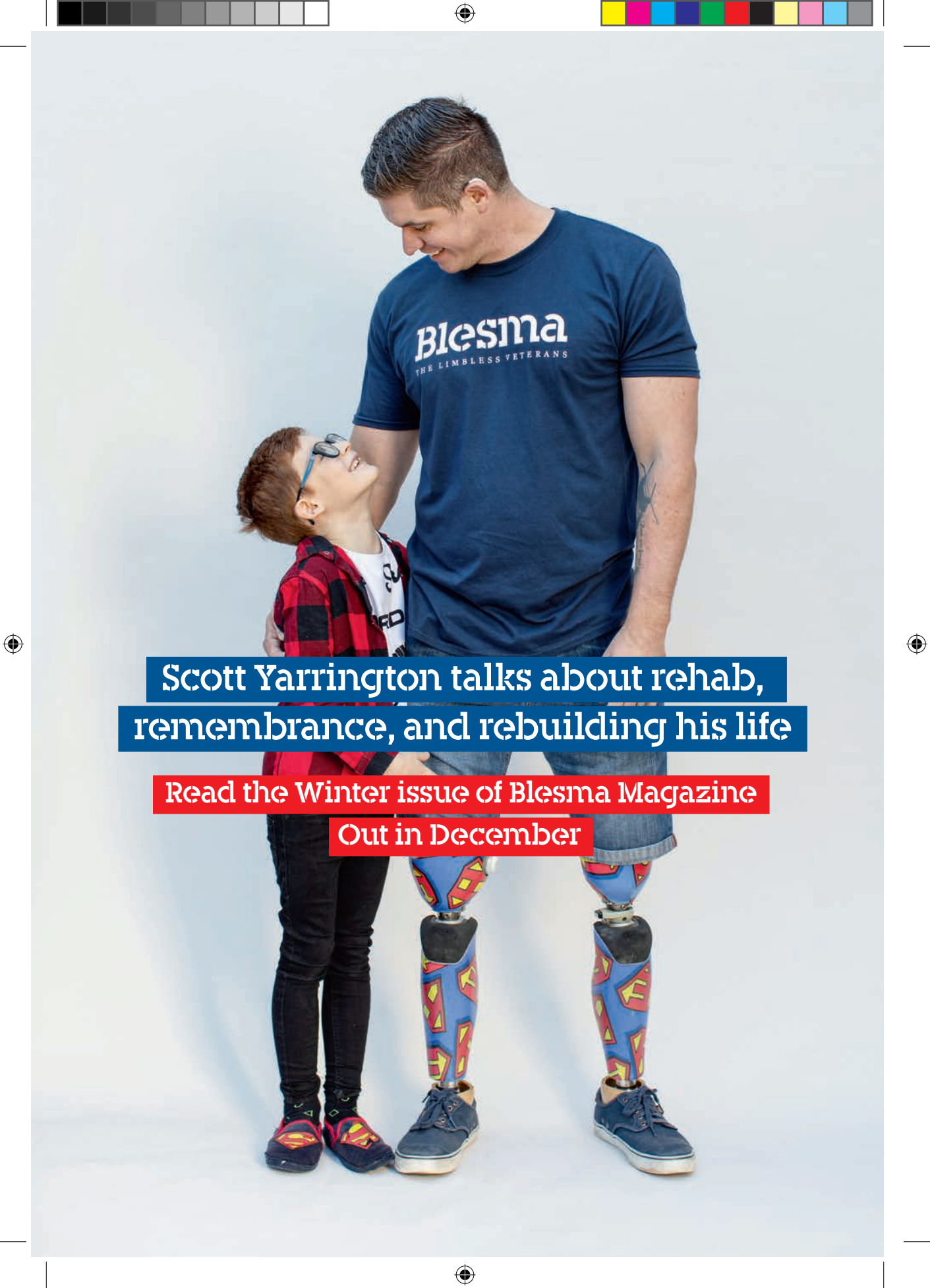
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## Have your say!

From the Activities Programme to Members' Weekend,  
tell us what you think in our Members' survey

**Inside: Where will you go with the Veterans Railcard?**



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remembrance, and rebuilding his life**

**Read the Winter issue of Blesma Magazine**

**Out in December**

# Blesma Bulletin

## Winter 2020



Welcome to the Winter 2020 edition of the Bulletin. This is the 38th Bulletin for which I've been responsible since I joined Blesma on 01 April 2008 as the National Welfare Officer.

You may be wondering why I'm writing this editorial. The reason is that I recently made the decision to leave Blesma

after almost 13 wonderful years. Lockdown presented me with the opportunity to live with my husband full-time – something of a novelty as I've been commuting between Essex and Surrey on a weekly basis since we married in May 2018. The time together focused our minds on our plans to relocate, and we hope to move in the New Year; a move that is not conducive to working in Chelmsford.

As I reflect on Blesma 2008 and Blesma 2020, the constants and the changes, three things stand out. The first is how Blesma has adapted to enable us to meet Members' changing needs whilst never losing sight of the sacrifices of previous generations of Members and the ethos that they instilled into the very DNA of the Association. The second is the privilege of getting to know Members over the last 13 years, and the third is the joy of working with such a caring, professional and

dedicated team of colleagues. As for the highlights of the last 12 years – there are too many to mention! However, the expansion of the Independence and Wellbeing team – which enabled us to provide more bespoke and specialist support to Members – the introduction of the Outreach Programme, and numerous behind-the-scenes initiatives which I hope have improved the effectiveness of the support that we provide, including the new membership database, really stand out for me.

Finally, I must mention Pete Shields and his retirement after more than 15 years as BSO (NE). Pete has had a significant impact on the Association and will be sorely missed by Members and colleagues alike. We wish him a long, happy and healthy retirement. Pete's relief is Christine Landess who takes over on 27 November. We're delighted that Christine is joining us – look out for an interview with her in the Spring 2021 Bulletin.

This Bulletin features the usual mix of news, articles and updates on support and services for Members, and I hope you find it useful. It has been an honour to be part of Blesma and I will remember my time with this wonderful Association with great affection.

With my very best wishes to you all.

**Heather Betts**  
*Director Independence and Wellbeing*



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# Administration isn't a dirty word

**A**s the world continues to battle coronavirus, I thought this might be a good time to give you an insight into some of the work that has been going on behind the scenes at Blesma.

NHS Limb Services have been significantly impacted by redeployments of staff, as well as from staff being placed on furlough and others trying to work from home to 'triage' Limb Centre patients so that urgent cases are still able to get access to support.

At the time of writing, the NHS Limb Centres are starting to make some headway with their waiting lists as staff return from furlough or redeployment. The future intent of the UK Government regarding further lockdowns (locally or nationally) remains to be seen. Whatever happens, we will remain reactive and pragmatic.

I started working from home from the end of March and despite finding it a bit strange at first, I quickly settled into a new routine. Thankfully, I already had all the necessary infrastructure and equipment as, prior to lockdown, I would often be on the road visiting Limb Centres or attending meetings and seminars, and the IT I was using was already linked up to the Blesma Cloud filing system.

As part of the Independence and Wellbeing team, I have worked very closely with Elaine, who deals



with membership administration, over the last eight years. However, I had no idea how much work there was in that role until Elaine was furloughed due to the lockdown. I was 'redeployed' to take on the work normally carried out by Elaine and quickly realised that administration isn't a dirty word.

Without being too dramatic, it is often the little things that go on in the background that make the rest of the system operate. BSOs need to be assured that the information held on our membership database is up to date and that applications are processed as quickly as possible

so that they can then contact new Members.

As you might expect, there's admin to do when we learn the sad news that a Member or Widow has passed away. We need to ensure the right people are informed so that any necessary support can be arranged if appropriate, and that we can write to the family to express our condolences.

During lockdown it quickly became clear that the Association needed to adapt some of its processes because the partner organisations we usually work with were either temporarily

**BSO (Prosthetics)**  
**Brian Chenier**



unavailable or unable to process requests for information because staff had been placed on furlough or were working from home without access to records.

For example, confirming a potential Member's military service information via the various records offices was difficult as they closed or had reduced access to files. The decision was made to adopt a pragmatic approach, and where there was a lack of documentary evidence of military service, I would have a discussion with the potential Member to establish if they had served.

I was amazed at some of the levels of detail and memories some potential Members could recall from their service, including the names of different barracks or commanding officers, and even the name of the regimental goat!

The one thing everyone was able to remember very clearly was their Service Number. In these cases, the potential Member would be accepted as a Member with a note to the BSOs to follow up and confirm when feasible. We also accepted photographs of proof of service rather than insisting that people left their homes to

post paperwork to the office in Chelmsford.

Another significant change the Association made was to implement an online application form which allowed potential Members to apply directly via the Blesma website. This has worked very well so far, with the record for processing a new Member being about 30 minutes from them hitting the 'apply now' button. This was particularly helpful as the Member was still in hospital following a serious accident and his BSO was able to make contact the same day.

The average time now for new Members to be accepted from point of application is between one and two working days (although it is often the same day) and initial contact from the BSO is within one week (although often quicker). Since the start of the lockdown at the end of March, Blesma has accepted 79 new Members.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, the NHS Limb Services are starting to make headway with their waiting lists. For the time being, however, I would encourage Members to only contact their Limb Centre if their prosthetic need is urgent.

We do understand that delays in accessing support from your Limb Centre can cause distress and so please do get in contact with your BSO or myself if you need any help in contacting your Limb Centre.

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***If you have a question or would like advice about prosthetics, please contact BSO (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier on 020 8548 7080, at [bsoprosthetics@blesma.org](mailto:bsoprosthetics@blesma.org) or visit [www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org)***

# SWV Pain Resilience Programme

The charity Supporting Wounded Veterans has set up a five-week Pain Resilience Programme (PRP) designed specifically for veterans.

The online programme places small groups with fully qualified clinicians to give veterans who are struggling with chronic pain the tools required to understand and manage their pain.

## The Pain Resilience Programme includes sessions relating to:

- Pain management
- Psychology of pain and resilience
- Medication review and management
- Physical interventions
- Pain management and work/occupation

The PRP is a group-based programme, with the group component reported as being particularly helpful as it allows a discussion of pain in a safe environment with others who have had similar experiences.

## Through each programme, veterans have access to information on:

- The physiological response to pain, and an understanding as to why pain develops
  - The function and effects of medication on the brain, and when they are most effective.
- Individual advice and full



- support is given regarding medication reduction
- Strategies to manage pain more successfully, with the end goal of considering employment options
  - Strategies to improve sleep patterns and relaxation
  - Strategies to manage negative changes in mood caused by chronic pain, using psychological approaches in order to harness a better understanding of thoughts, beliefs and feelings in relation to pain and its impact on quality of life
  - How to identify meaningful goals and achieve them

- Specific exercises to aim to help affected areas feel less sensitive

## CRITERIA FOR JOINING THE COURSE

To attend the course you must be able to commit to a five-week online course from home or work. You will be required to attend two hour-long sessions every week (these take place on Monday and Thursday afternoons) and one group session led by a SWV veteran to share your thoughts and feedback on the sessions.

*If you are interested in taking part in the programme you will need to complete an online application form which can be found at [www.supportingwoundedveterans.com/prp](http://www.supportingwoundedveterans.com/prp)*

**Tickets now on Sale**  
Wednesday 2 December 2020 at 7pm  
A virtual evening of carols, singing, celebration & festive inspiration

**CHRISTMAS SHOPPING WITH SWV**  
Our online auction will be open from Monday 2 November - Tuesday 15 December. The ONLY place to do your Christmas shopping this year.

[Find out More](#)

# The PETT Study



**Q**ueen's University Belfast and King's College London are investigating two treatments (talking therapies) for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in UK military veterans:

- 1) Reconsolidation of Traumatic Memories (RTM)
- 2) Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TF-CBT)

They are inviting veterans to participate in this research project, which is comparing two treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The study aims to compare a new treatment called Reconsolidation of Traumatic Memories (RTM) with an existing treatment called Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TF-CBT).

## What is Reconsolidation of Traumatic Memories (RTM)?

RTM is a possible new treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder. It uses a process whereby the person is asked to visualise in a way that is intended to be comfortable, non-traumatising, and non-intrusive. At no point will the person be asked to describe the detail of the experiences that led to their PTSD. The treatment is offered in up to five weekly individual sessions each lasting 90 minutes. Research in the USA has found that the sessions can help alleviate some symptoms of PTSD.



## What is Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TF-CBT)?

TF-CBT is the recommended treatment across the world for PTSD. It involves up to 18 weekly individual sessions over the course of several months. The treatment aims to reduce the patient's sense of current threat by:

- 1) Identifying and changing a person's feelings of threat due to the original trauma/s and/or its aftermath
- 2) Giving detail to the trauma memory and identifying triggers to the intrusive memories returning
- 3) Reducing the use of thinking and behaviour patterns that have not been helpful to the

person and that often maintain the problem

Those running the studies are looking for Army, Royal Air Force, and Royal Navy/Royal Marines veterans who:

- Are aged 18 years or older
- Are living or working in the United Kingdom
- Have a diagnosis of, or the person suspects they may have, PTSD (not currently receiving psychological treatment for PTSD)

*If you are interested in receiving more information or potentially joining the study, please contact the PETT team directly by email at [pett@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:pett@kcl.ac.uk)*

# Amputee Health Discussion Group

**H**ealthcare professionals have been sharing their knowledge and experience with Members living in the Wales and West area in Zoom talks.

The Amputee Health Discussion Group, organised by BSO Tom Hall, allows Members to meet and interact with a different health professional every fortnight, giving Members the chance to share their stories of pain and resolution.

So far, guests have included Peter McCarthy, the manager of Swansea Limb Centre and Dr Fergus Jepson (right) of Preston Disabled Services Centre. Guests have offered information and advice on a range of topics from pain management and nutrition, to prosthetics and self-care.

As a fairly new amputee of two years, Mark Barton has found the group hugely beneficial.

“I’ve been getting involved as much as I can to learn from other Members’ experiences and generally be better informed about amputation, prosthetics and pain,” said Mark. “I’ve learned basic things, like how to cope with sweat in your socket to prevent blisters. You can meet people at activities, but it takes time to share problems.

“These groups have been specifically designed to start conversations about limb problems and allow Members to swap our personal advice on what works and what doesn’t work.”



Dr Fergus Jepson has been one of the guests of the discussion group

As well as gaining advice and information some Members, like Steve Fisher, have been helping the group by sharing their own personal stories.

“Some Members are learning what to do if and when they get pain, but I could write a book about suffering, mental health and alcohol abuse, so I’m choosing to join the group to pass on my experience,” said Steve, who suffered with neuromas for more than 16 years after amputation.

“The talk that Dr Jepson gave about pain and suffering was fantastic and I was able to relate to everything he said. The discussion group offers a fantastic opportunity for people to listen to other Members and professionals,

and seek advice and information. Tom is doing a fantastic job and it is a worthwhile Zoom activity.”

Tom Hall said; “The discussion group is really valuable. Some of our Members are really starting to get to know each other because of the initiative, and the sessions give everyone the chance to discuss things openly but confidentially.

“The hope is to bring in more specialists to give advice and talks on pain management and the treatments that are available, as well as other areas of health for amputees.”

*If you would be interested in taking part in a future Amputee Health Discussion Group, contact Tom Hall on [bsowest@blesma.org](mailto:bsowest@blesma.org)*



# Step Together – Elaine Corner's story

**B**lesma Member Elaine Corner was medically discharged from the Army in 2012 after becoming a below-knee amputee following a motorbike accident. As she wasn't working, she engaged with Step Together Volunteering, a charity that helps injured service personnel, veterans and their families (as well as other groups) find volunteering opportunities in their communities.

The charity was able to find Elaine a placement with Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue giving road safety talks in schools, and with Operation Nightingale on an archaeological dig. When she heard that Step Together was looking to recruit someone to work with veterans and help find them volunteering placements she jumped at the chance!

Elaine has been doing the job for six-and-a-half years, during which time she has helped hundreds of veterans into volunteering. She even finds the time to continue the volunteering that started her on her new career path.

"I love the fact that every day is different," said Elaine when asked what she likes best about her job. "One day I might be working alongside a client cutting down scrub on a nature reserve, the next I could be visiting a charity that does furniture upcycling to check its suitability for a client. I have met such a variety of people and



**Blesma Member Elaine Corner**

it's very rewarding to see the difference volunteering can make to people's lives.

"Many people are unsure what they want to do with their lives or are stuck at home not having the confidence to try something new. With support from Step Together they can discover new interests.

Sometimes that can lead to employment, but wherever it leads they will be helping out in their local communities and meeting all sorts of people."

Step Together Volunteering has staff just like Elaine across England and Wales ready to help veterans and their families start something new. They take referrals from Forces charities and organisations that work with veterans, but anyone can self-refer if they feel they would benefit.

Placements are bespoke to each client and fit in around existing commitments such as childcare. The placements could be anything; from helping out at local sports clubs or wildlife hospitals, to assisting art groups for the elderly or volunteering in a museum.

During lockdown, Step Together has been working with clients to find them volunteering opportunities that they can do from home such as telephone befriending or painting models for museum displays.

*If you are interested in finding out more about volunteering, visit [www.step-together.org.uk](http://www.step-together.org.uk) or speak to your BSO*

# Acupuncturist gives talk on pain and anxiety

**A**lex Gilmartin is an acupuncturist and former NHS physiotherapist. After giving a talk to people with fibromyalgia – a long-term condition that causes pain all over the body – about the virtues of acupressure for chronic pain and anxiety, she contacted Scotland’s Outreach Officer Emma Gratton to offer her services.

Alex told Emma how her knowledge of acupressure could prove to be useful to Blesma Members, particularly to those who experience Phantom Limb Pain, and a talk with Members was scheduled for 04 September.

The online talk was well attended, with Members from a number of areas tuning in. Alex asked some of the group for a bit of background on their injuries before talking about acupressure and the theory behind it. During the talk she provided practical demonstrations and encouraged Members to find their own acupressure points.

After the Zoom talk Alex shared an online e-book that she had written which included charts showing acupressure points as well as videos giving further practical demonstrations. Alex kindly gave her time and these resources to Blesma for free, and has also put Emma in contact with another organisation that may be able to run a more formal training package



Alex Gilmartin provided practical demonstrations during her talk

if Members are keen to learn more about the benefits of acupressure.

“This was a thought-provoking talk that explored the possibility of rapid pain relief without the necessity of visiting a therapist,” said Widow Member Lorraine Anderson. “It was very helpful for me personally as I have had fibromyalgia for many years and am always seeking fresh ways to alleviate pain.”

Alex’s background is in physiotherapy and traditional acupuncture. “I find the blend excellent for treating both the physical and the mental conditions that we see in the clinic,” she says.

“As a registered acupuncturist at the Health and Wellbeing Centre at Dumfries House, I am part of the team responsible for delivering complementary therapies to the programmes for chronic pain, health and wellbeing, menopause and fertility.

“When lockdown was announced we were forced to go virtual and all presentations were delivered by Zoom. All acupuncture treatments had to stop, too. Now more than ever, when people are unable to access therapists or the NHS clinics, we need tools that we can use ourselves to manage our conditions.”

# New railcard to offer discounts to veterans

**A** new railcard that will provide travel discounts for military veterans is set to launch in the coming weeks.

UK veterans, as well as their spouses and children, may soon be eligible for the Veterans Railcard, which will offer up to 30 per cent off rail travel across England, Scotland and Wales.

The railcard will cost £21 per year (£30 from April 2021) and will include savings on most first class and standard fares, including off-peak travel cards in London.



It will allow the card holder to travel at a discounted rate, along with a companion and up to four children. Cards will be valid for 12 months from the date of issue.

“This railcard will help open up opportunities to veterans, whether

through employment and retraining, or by strengthening links with friends and family,” said Grant Shapps, Secretary of State for Transport. “I believe that enabling former service personnel to travel more easily is the least we can do.”

At the time of this issue of the Bulletin going to press, the new railcard was set to launch in time for Remembrance Day.

*For more on the railcard, visit [www.veterans-railcard.co.uk](http://www.veterans-railcard.co.uk)*

RAILCARD	DISABLED PERSONS	VETERANS
<b>Who for</b>	Anyone with required proof of disability. Valid for the railcard holder and a companion	Former members of the UK Armed Forces. Valid for railcard holder, companion and four children
<b>How much</b>	1 year £30 3 years £54	1 year £30 3 years £70 (intro price £21 for 1 year until 31 March 2021)
<b>Where to buy</b>	Online or post	Online or post
<b>How to apply</b>	Digitally or in person	Digitally or in person
<b>Restrictions</b>	No time restrictions	No time restrictions
<b>Minimum Fare</b>	No	£12 on journeys between 04.30 and 09:59 Monday-Friday. (Excludes weekends, public holidays, and throughout July and August)
<b>Average annual saving</b>	£115	NA
<b>Discount on standard class</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>Discount on first class</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>Discount on Tube</b>	Oyster pay as you go single fares and daily caps	TBC

# Team Endeavour swaps scrums for cycling

**B**lesma Members have created a new all-abilities cycling group to stay active during the pandemic. Before COVID-19, Team Endeavour was a wheelchair rugby squad, but as various contact sports are unable to be played because of coronavirus, Member Roch Rochester suggested cycling as a way to get together safely and get “out into the green”.

The group cycled with a mix of different abilities on the Prudential My Ride and raised more than £700 for the Association. While on the ride, they were spotted by Cycling UK, an organisation which looks to get more of the British public involved in cycling and to make cycling more accessible.

Cycling UK has since taken Team Endeavour under its wing by providing funding for Members to train as cycling leaders, providing the group with insurance to cover their trips, and giving funds so they can buy safety equipment.

Roch and the team are currently working on creating a map of cycle rides for Members. Each route will be rated for difficulty and any specific hurdles – such as tight gates that are inaccessible to hand bikes or double gates which may require a rider to dismount – will be highlighted.

Though the group plans to ride to support a number of military charities, Blesma is particularly dear to Roch’s heart as it was on



a Blesma cycling trip to Arnhem that he initially discovered a passion for cycling.

“I would ride maybe once a week or so before that trip, but riding on the Blesma trip to Arnhem really got me started and expanded my horizons. Blesma has also funded a power-assisted motor upgrade for my bike, which helps a lot.”

The group meets for a ‘club ride’ every fortnight, with Members meeting individually for casual rides in between.

“When lockdown started I just knew that I would need to get out into the green,” said Roch. “We had to stop our wheelchair rugby sessions because it is such a high contact sport. There is so much we can’t do at the moment, but cycling is something we can.”

“It’s great to be in an all-abilities group, because it’s good to have someone to talk to on your level if you’re using a recumbent bike or a handcycle. We’ve also been scoping out routes and making notes for other Members. That way, they will know if there are any challenges to accessibility in advance. I have found this out the hard way before and luckily been helped by passers-by!”

*If you would like to find out more about Team Endeavour, you can get in touch with them by email at [endeavourccc1@gmail.com](mailto:endeavourccc1@gmail.com), or you can join their Strava group to share routes at [Endeavourccc](#) or find them on Facebook*

## How to apply for a gardening grant

**S**ometimes it can be difficult for Members to maintain their gardens. Blesma offers an annual gardening grant of up to £300, which can be applied for using the proforma that has been inserted into this issue of the Bulletin.

The application, which must be submitted by 31 December 2020, needs to be accompanied by receipts or a signed statement from your gardener. Unfortunately, Blesma is not able to award grants to Members who have paid a relation to maintain their garden.

If you have mislaid the gardening grant form, or there wasn't one inserted into your copy of this Bulletin, please contact Blesma Chelmsford on 020 8590 1124 or by email at [grantsadmin@blesma.org](mailto:grantsadmin@blesma.org)

Please bear with us as we process your gardening grant. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, our staff may be operating remotely.



## Pilgrim Bandits travel the length of the UK

**T**en Blesma Members recently undertook a huge journey alongside a group of emergency services personnel – travelling from Land's End to John O'Groats in support of a comrade with motor neurone disease.

The 1,000-mile trip was spearheaded by the Pilgrim Bandits, a charity that organises endurance trips to challenge injured service and emergency services personnel, many of whom struggle with PTSD. Pilgrim Bandits' motto is "Always A Little Further" – pushing veterans beyond what they thought was possible in order to build confidence.

The team completed the challenge using push and hand bikes, as well as specially adapted tandems. They smashed their fundraising target; having originally set themselves a goal of £10,000, they almost doubled it with a final total of more than £19,000.



The team almost doubled their £10,000 fundraising target

# Paul Rose talks to Members

**I**nternational explorer, conservationist and presenter Paul Rose gave a virtual talk to Blesma Members via Zoom in September. The talk was arranged and facilitated by Sarah Payne, Outreach Officer for the South West, who has had contact with Paul in the past due to her experience in scuba diving.

Sarah extended the offer to Members from all over the UK, which resulted in a great turn out as more than 30 Members and their families tuned in to find out more about Paul's expeditions. There was even an opportunity for Paul to speak to Members, whom he called "the bravest people in Britain", one on one.

Paul has a military connection from his time as Base Commander of Rothera Research Station in Antarctica for the British Antarctic Survey, for which he was awarded HM The Queen's Polar Medal.

As well as Blesma Members and staff, members of veterans' scuba charity Deptherapy were also in attendance, as Paul is the charity's vice chairman.

Paul shared many details about his expeditions which we don't get to see when his documentaries make it onto our screens. Intricate planning is involved; from finding the right locations to liaising with local governments all over the world. It was interesting to learn that even on such scientific



**Explorer and presenter Paul Rose on one of his expeditions**

and technologically advanced expeditions, sometimes the humble whiteboard remains the most important planning tool!

Paul has certainly had some fantastic adventures. Everyone in attendance listened with bated breath as he recounted his near-deadly brush with a curious polar bear, and another with his own wolfdog.

"What an amazing life Paul has led," said Blesma Member Darran Thompson after the talk. "I can't thank him enough for giving us all an insight into it and for entertaining us with a very knowledgeable talk."

Once the talk had ended it was time for a Q&A session, kicked off by Scott, who was watching with his dad, Blesma Member Matt Webb. Scott asked Paul

which walking route in the UK he would most love to do. When he said a coast-to-coast walk, Roch Rochester (see separate story on p12) explained that the cyclists of Team Endeavour were planning such a journey and invited Paul to join them – an offer that he gladly accepted. Watch this space!

"I enjoyed the talk a lot," said Scott. "It was really interesting to learn about Paul's life. He spoke very clearly and answered everyone's questions."

Dad Matt agreed: "I really enjoyed Paul Rose's talk. I have an interest in diving and walking, and have seen Paul on TV, so it was great to attend his presentation. I thought it worked really well with the opportunity to ask questions at the end. Thank you Blesma for arranging this."

Soon the questions were coming in thick and fast, and it became clear that Paul and our Members had much in common – from his love of the Lake District to his sense of humour.

Member Peter Sherston-Baker also asked Paul how life in the Arctic had changed since Peter was last there with the HMS Protector in 1965.

All in all, it was an enlightening and fascinating talk which was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone who listened in. We very much hope to be able to work with Paul again very soon.

# Phil Parker runs to remember 25 years on

**A** quarter of a century ago, on 25 June 1995, a team from 8th Infantry Brigade ran from John O’Groats to Land’s End in aid of Blesma and the Altnagelvin ICU. The team (below) ran for 10 days, covering 1010 miles in a relay.

Sadly, on the penultimate day of the challenge, WO2 Phil Pert who was the organiser and inspiration behind the fundraising challenge, was struck and killed whilst protecting the runners on his bike.

On the 25th anniversary of the accident, Phil Parker, one of the members of the original running team, set out to complete his own challenge to commemorate Phil’s passing. His goal was to take part in the RAF Wyton Pathfinder march, which covered 46 miles around the original Pathfinder airfields in Cambridgeshire. However, due to the COVID-19

pandemic, the event was cancelled. Not wanting to waste six months of training, Phil came up with a new challenge.

“I decided to do my own run and because I turned 48 on 25 June I decided to run 48 miles,” said Phil. “I ran four loops out into the fens – six miles out and six miles back – from a starting point in my village.”

In the end, Phil completed the epic run in 10 hours and 18 minutes – a full seven minutes faster than his last Pathfinder run. Phil raised £750 for Blesma as well as raising funds to support the set up of a military co-responder ambulance which will be based at RAF Wyton. This ambulance will be crewed by volunteers from the Army, Navy, and RAF, as well as MoD civil servants and Phil himself.

# My Prudential RideLondon is a success

**B**ack in August, hundreds of cyclists took to the road all over the country as part of the My Prudential RideLondon challenge. This year, in place of the Prudential RideLondon event, which had to be cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic, cyclists across the UK were invited to take part in the free challenge which they could adapt to any distance and complete on



any amount of self-propelled wheels. A number of people took part for Blesma, raising more than £1,000 in the process.

One participant was Neil Padley, who raised £290 for the Association. He was riding for his son, Stuart, who became a Blesma Member during lockdown. The Association has provided Stuart with an electric golf buggy which, according to Neil’s fundraising page, “has given Stuart a massive boost in confidence and greater mobility on the golf course.”

Blesma would like to thank everyone who took part all for their support and dedication!



# Art class during lockdown

**W**ith our diaries scrubbed of social engagements and activities, 2020 has proved to be something of an awkward year. I hope you have managed to stay safe and well.

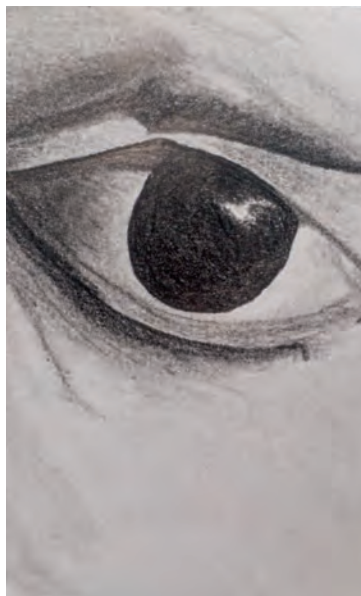
Blesma activities going online have helped to keep isolation, anxiety, and loneliness at bay. I was grateful to join the Virtual Family Friendly Art Workshop via Zoom, a three-day activity spread over three weeks. The activity, which was run by Metal Southend who have hosted art workshops with Blesma in the past, really gave me something different to look forward to.

## EXPERIENCE WITH DRAWING WASN'T NECESSARY...PHEW!

Starting with pencil drawings, the first day we were given a warm-up exercise of drawing anything that was in front of us, but without taking the pencil off the paper. I immediately thought back to the Etch A Sketch!

We then spent the rest of the hour sketching a view from our window. Being a wheelchair user, my 18th century cottage is totally inaccessible to enjoy any views, so I drew the curtains instead! This gave me the chance to experiment with shading and folds.

The second week, our warm-up exercise involved drawing in colour to represent our feelings. A difficult task, which I tried to conjure up



Susi took a break from horse riding to take part in an art workshop

with fire and brimstone! (Pretty much sums me up!)

The main exercise for the session was then to take inspiration from the Great Artists. I chose Georges Seurat's *Bathers at Asnières*, and gave it a twist by making the boy who is the focus of the original piece an amputee in a wheelchair thinking of better times.

The third and final week was focused on drawing self-portraits. In the warm-up we had to draw ourselves, but without looking! Some of the finished pieces resembled trolls and gonks (if you are old enough to remember those characters from childhood).

The final exercise was another self-portrait. For this main exercise, instead of drawing my whole face, I went obscure and drew one eye. I used a 12B pencil for this task, using a small piece of leather (I'm a saddler by trade) for smudging. This was definitely my best piece from the entire workshop.

My thanks to Blesma for organising this Zoom activity. It was thoroughly enjoyable, and it was lovely to be able to chat and catch up with other Members, being sociable without leaving the house! Please can you run more art workshops?

**Susi Rogers-Hartley**



# Blesma hosts inaugural Remembrance 11K event

**T**his year, the Association was delighted to launch its inaugural Remembrance 11K, a fundraising event which commemorated the significant day of Remembrance whilst raising vital funds for Members.

Armistice Day is an important time to reflect on the sacrifices of those who have served. Despite it not being possible to attend the parade at the Cenotaph this year, the Association still paused to pay its respects to members of the military community with its first-ever Remembrance 11k.

The unique event brought the Blesma community together (albeit remotely) in local parks and neighbourhoods across the UK. From 08.30 on Remembrance Sunday (08 November) Members, staff, and supporters joined virtually to complete 11K in remembrance of the fallen and those who came home injured.

The Association also streamed the event live from its Chelmsford office so participants could join a live warm-up session with a personal trainer and experience the pre-event build-up.

Members and fundraisers took time to share their inspirational stories and spoke about the importance of Remembrance in pre-recorded interviews and self-recorded home videos that were streamed during and after the event.



**Everyone who took part in the 11K event received a commemorative medal**

RAF veteran, Paralympian and TV presenter Sean Rose – who is also a Blesma Member – kindly donated his time and expertise to host the event, which ended with a two-minute silence.

“Remembrance Day is an important time to pause and reflect on the sacrifices of all those who have served our nation,” said Blesma’s Chief Executive Jon Bryant. “Although we could not

attend the Cenotaph or gather in groups this year, I am pleased that we were able to come together online and hold the 11K event to commemorate them.”

*You can watch the stream on Blesma’s Facebook page (by searching Blesma, The Limbless Veterans) or on the Association’s YouTube channel (by searching /Blesma1932)*

# Discovering the benefits of being online

**S**ince lockdown, virtual activities have been becoming more and more popular, but not everyone is confident with using digital technology. Blesma's Digital Inclusion Programme has allowed many Members to discover the benefits of being online. Back in April, 65-year-old Robin Smithers (right, centre) received a tablet from Blesma to help him get up to speed with the virtual activities being delivered in his area.

## CASE STUDY ROBIN SMITHERS

"Before lockdown, I never wanted to go online as I'm quite happy in my own private space. I used my computer to check my emails and had a Kindle for reading, but I left the social media to my wife, Carol.

"When I went into self-isolation, I started seeing different activities taking place online and I wanted to get involved. I'd been on a few activities like Seniors Week and Members' Weekend, so wanted to get to know more Members.

"The first activity that came along was the breath workshop with Emily Hightower. It took place on Zoom and it started off as a nightmare. I had both my computer and Kindle at the ready, and my Support Officer Kevin Long was on the phone. Between the devices I could manage to appear on the screen, but no one



Robin Smithers (centre, wearing gloves) has benefited from being online

could hear me! That's when Kev said I could benefit from a tablet.

"My Outreach Officer Darren Fuller helped me with the IT training over the phone and then, a couple of weeks later, I was on a Zoom call again! I've taken part

in so many superb activities since: I have been involved in Making Connections, I've been doing yoga and quizzes with Members in Scotland, and I have taken part in the Royal Hospital Chelsea's virtual breakfast club, where

**"When I went into self-isolation, I started seeing different activities taking place online and I wanted to get involved and to get to know more Members"**

I've met some amazing grenadiers of various ages and ranks.

"I've really broadened my reach since having the tablet. It allows me to do so much that I couldn't do on my computer. Darren even helped me set up Blesma Connects too, which allows me to keep in touch with Members I meet during all the activities.

"It's been a brilliant success. I don't know what I'd be doing without Blesma – perhaps lounging around the house, but Blesma has certainly changed that. Lockdown has forced me to pick up technology, but it's really helped me enjoy mixing with Members of all ages. It's also helped me connect with family online, too.

"I'm completely confident with it now. It's amazing who I have managed to get in contact with. If I have any problems, I'm able to give Darren a call and he can try to talk me through the issue on the phone. But right now, I'm happy with how everything is working."

#### CASE STUDY GEORGE WATSON

George Watson, 97, bought an iPad last year after his deteriorating eyesight stopped him from completing a computer course. He has, with great determination, taught himself how to use the device independently, along with some helpful tips from family. This has helped to keep his mind active and satisfy his growing curiosity when family members discussed things they had seen online.

Unlike his other devices, George discovered he could enlarge the text size on his iPad so he could enjoy reading once again. He also uses the device to play card games and read the news, while his family



**George Watson uses his iPad to keep in touch with his family**

share a live photo album with him, so he can sit and flick through it at his leisure. It also came to light that family members could have better contact with George through FaceTime rather than on the phone.

"My father has a hearing impairment but through FaceTime he is able to pick up good parts of the conversation," said George's daughter, Alison. "Now that he isn't able to get out as much, it gives him face-to-face contact again and the conversations are far longer with FaceTime as he is hearing more and can hold things up to show us.

"We can have a really good chat now whereas on the phone it was quite limited because he just didn't get the clarity. There are only certain bits where he might not catch what we are saying, but it has proven to be a better means of communication for him. It's been absolutely marvellous. It's amazing what can be done."

*If you would like to get online and need help finding the right equipment or learning to use it, contact your BSO or Outreach Officer about Blesma's Digital Inclusion Programme*

# Making ‘Taystful’ treats via Zoom

**A**ward-winning pastry chef Shona Sutherland has been teaching Members in Scotland and Northern Ireland how to make ‘Taystful’ treats.

Shona from Taystful in Blairgowrie, Scotland has been hosting Members and their families live on Zoom for her chocolate-making workshops.

After signing up and receiving an instruction pack delivered to their front doors, the groups have enjoyed making their own filled chocolates and have learned how to cast moulds, make ganache, and finish the chocolates.

“I have thoroughly enjoyed the activity,” said Olivia Zambonini from North Lanarkshire. “I was shielding and live on my own, so it was nice to connect with other Members. Shona made it easy to follow along on Zoom and we only needed basic ingredients and utensils to take part.

“Afterwards, I shared some of the chocolates with a neighbour’s two wee daughters who said they tasted great!”



What else Members said about the workshops:

**“It was entertaining. I got to interact with other Members despite not being together. The grandchildren couldn’t join me, but I sent them the chocolates and they loved them”**

Mark Rogerson

**“It was great that I could enjoy the activity with my wife. Shona led us through everything and didn’t move on to the next stage until everyone was ready”**

Ken De Soyza

## Blesma to launch Week of Gaming in November

**B**lesma is on the hunt for video gamers to take part in a 24-hour gameathon. Whether you play *Call of Duty*, *Mario Kart* or even *Animal Crossing*, all Blesma Members are welcome to join the 24-hour live video gaming stream, which will launch Blesma's Week of Gaming on 21 November.

The stream will be held on Twitch so you can take part from the comfort of your own home. With our Members at the controllers, you will be able to game for as long or as little as you like, forming a 'tag-team' with your fellow Blesma Members.

Though we cannot all get together in person at this challenging time, we hope that players from all walks of the Blesma community will join together in the virtual space, doing what they love during the week, which aims to raise awareness of the Association's new fundraising event Game On For Blesma.

Participants will be able to set their own fundraising challenges their way, whether that means hosting a competitive stream, an at-home tournament, or even by being sponsored to dress as their favourite character for the day.

*To be part of the 24-hour gaming team or for more about the event, please contact Chris Knight on [regfundmgr@blesma.org](mailto:regfundmgr@blesma.org) To learn more about streaming or join the conversation with other gaming Members visit <https://discord.com/invite/qcJ4Ds6>*



## HighGround charity back in action

**M**ilitary charity HighGround has begun hosting its Rural Weeks once again, having held its first of the year in September. HighGround helps service leavers, reservists and veterans find jobs, careers and vocational opportunities in the land-based sector including farming, forestry, conservation, landscape design and much more.

Thanks to funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Trust, HighGround has developed Rural Experience Weeks (REW) to improve veterans' mental health and wellbeing with a five-day, fully residential programme that includes horticultural therapy, arboriculture, forest school and smallholding.

REWs are delivered at Bicton College in rural Devon. The weeks offer an opportunity to be outdoors, doing things with like-minded people whilst learning about employment and self-employment opportunities in the land-based sector.

To take part, you must have served in HM Forces, although it doesn't matter when it was, or for how long. The charity understands that not everyone is ready for full-time employment, and so is there to help you get closer to finding out what you really want to do, and then travel with you as you get there.

Blesma Member Matt Woollard attended the course in June 2018. "I can't rate the course highly enough," said Matt. "My BSO recommended it and if you are looking for a career in agriculture or horticulture, then it's perfect. I loved it and it really helped me secure my current job as a school site manager, where I cut hedges, do guttering, mend fences, unblock drains, and carry out general maintenance tasks."

*If this opportunity is of interest to you, please ask your BSO or Outreach Officer to make contact with HighGround on your behalf*

# Family enjoy a much-needed holiday

**T**he Briscoe / Stranack family are smiling once again after Blesma helped them secure a much-needed family break. After a year of ups and downs, which were only magnified during lockdown, Blesma Member Danny Stranack, partner Alison and their four children Elise, Megan, Abbie and George were in need of some well-deserved respite.

Wanting to help the family relax and spend some quality time together, Outreach Officer Kirsten Morrissey stepped in to offer Blesma's support.

"We have faced a lot of personal matters as a family over the past 12 months, and we've been living out of boxes for nearly a year while we've been trying to sell our house," said Alison. "Add home schooling to that and we were all at the end of our tether. Kirsten got in touch and asked if we'd like to book a trip to escape our troubles. The break was fabulous."

The family spent seven days at Haven Holidays Park in Brighton, where they enjoyed trips to the beach, pier, and pool, and took advantage of the park's facilities.

"It was a lovely, relaxing time for us all and gave us the chance to enjoy being together. The break gave us such a lift and when we came back we were ready to carry on where we'd left off with the house move," said Alison.

Danny added: "I was going through a rough time with post-traumatic stress disorder and it's been hard on my family, too. Blesma's support went further than me. It helped Alison and the kids, too. I can't fault Blesma. Kirsten and Mike [*Downes, BSO North West*] have been outstanding."



# Meet our new Regional Fundraising Manager

## CHRIS KNIGHT

### Tell us a bit about your work background...

I have worked in the charity sector for the last 11 years, working in disadvantaged communities and with young homeless people. For six of those years, my focus has been mostly on corporate and event fundraising. Before life in the charity sector I worked in the print industry for 17 years, but I actually started my working life as a pastry chef (so cakes are my thing – mainly eating them!)

### What does your role entail?

My role as Regional Fundraising Manager is a varied one but essentially it is to increase income through regional fundraising activities. I support individuals, businesses, activity groups and schools that want to support our organisation by raising funds as well as organising regional events or activities.

### What has been the highlight of working at Blesma so far?

I've been at Blesma for just over six months, and for much of that time we have been working around the challenges that COVID-19 has presented. It has forced us to look at what we do and how we need to adapt our fundraising offer for our supporters in this current climate. The swift move to digital has been a steep learning curve



but one that I have enjoyed, and we are now starting to see the successes come in, which is really pleasing.

### Tell us a little about yourself?

I'm a dad to three sons – the youngest is three and the oldest is 22! I'm a huge football fan (I support Liverpool) and I'm also an FA-qualified coach and manage an under-8s football team, which one of my sons plays for. My partner and I enjoy going to see live music and comedy, which hopefully we'll be able to do again very soon. And I'm currently in the middle of renovating a house which we moved into in August.

# Pete Shields to retire in November

On 30 November, BSO Pete Shields will retire after 15 years of working at Blesma. He will be succeeded by Christine Landess, who will start ahead of Pete's departure in order to receive a full handover.

"After more than 15 years as BSO of the North East I have decided to retire from my post and will depart Blesma on 30 November," said Pete. "I have enjoyed my role immensely over the years, mainly due to the wonderful people – both Members and colleagues – who I have had the privilege to work with. I will be sad to leave, but life goes on, and other new and fresh challenges await."

Pete has had a significant impact during his time with the Association and will be missed by his colleagues and Members alike.

*Read more about Pete's time with the Association in the Winter issue of the magazine*



# Left boot is just the job for Kevin

**A** Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) fundraiser has donated her spare boots to Blesma Member Kevin Worsley (pictured right).

Last year, Commander Jane Allen finished an incredible two-year challenge of walking solo anti-clockwise around the coastline of mainland Britain to mark her close involvement with the WRNS100 and her retirement from the Royal Naval Reserve.

Over the course of 22 months Jane walked 5,485 miles and, as a result, her feet changed size several times on the journey, leaving her with four brand-new, unworn boots; two right boots in a size 9.5 and two left boots in a size 9.

Determined not to let the spare boots go to waste, she offered them to any interested Blesma Member for free and Kevin Worsley took her up on the offer.

When Kev heard about Jane's offer of boots, he was highly impressed with her efforts.

"Fantastic Ma'am. What an achievement!" said Kevin, who then joked about not needing the right boots.

"I'm really pleased the spare boots have not gone to waste and that Kevin has been able to make use of some of them," said Jane. "From my misfortune of feet growing at different rates, I'm delighted that someone else can benefit!"





## Northern Ireland given National Lottery funding

**B**lesma has been awarded a National Lottery grant of £9,557 to help Members and their families living in Northern Ireland. The National Lottery Community Fund has provided £2.7 million worth of grants to more than 50 projects that help tackle the big issues affecting communities, such as supporting victims of domestic violence, mental health support for families living with health conditions, and reducing isolation.

For Blesma Members in Northern Ireland, the grant will help fund some creative and therapeutic activities to improve their overall wellbeing, which has been impacted during these difficult times.



The team are looking forward to hosting activities in model making, jigsaw puzzles, cooking/baking, knitting and horticulture, as well as wood turning, clay pottery and nature-based therapy workshops.

“Thanks to players of the National Lottery, we are able to make a huge difference to the lives of our Members and their families living in Northern Ireland through activities,” said Fiona Morrison, Outreach Officer Northern Ireland. “We are delighted with the grant and look forward to engaging Members through these activities to help boost morale and provide them with a peer support network.”

## Invictus Games app aims to join WIS together

**T**he We Are Invictus app is designed for all Wounded, Injured and Sick (WIS) service personnel and veterans so that they can have a safe and secure space to support one another beyond the Invictus Games. You do not have to be a current or former Invictus Games competitor or triathlete to be eligible to sign up.

The platform is designed to offer opportunities in which the WIS community can take part. Recently, there have been running, rowing and cycling opportunities, details of employment opportunities available in the military charities sector, and details on course spaces from several different organisations.

The app also has details of different organisations that support the WIS community, offers the ability to chat with other WIS service personnel to see how they are getting on, and to share opportunities you know about with a like-minded community.

You can access the app through the Invictus Games Foundation website ([www.weareinvictus.co.uk](http://www.weareinvictus.co.uk)) or download it from the App Store or Google Play.

The registration process is designed to ensure that only those classified as Wounded, Injured and Sick during, or as a consequence of, military service are eligible to sign up. For that reason, registration can take up to seven days to approve.



# Pictures, presentations and books in Scotland

**T**he last few months have been very busy in Scotland. In line with our Contact Programme, we continue to engage with our Members to ensure they are ok, coping with the challenges set by the pandemic, and that they have no issues or concerns.

Our online activities continue, and we have seen Ian Reid's wife, Diane, win the baking competition with a fabulous rainbow cake. Our twice-weekly drop-in sessions have been enjoyed by Members, and the introduction of a monthly prosthetic forum with BSO Steve Burton in July has not only become a place where Members can raise concerns with Steve, but is also a place to share experiences, hints and tips with other Members.

Sadly, because of the recent introduction of further government restrictions, our planned golf day had to be cancelled, along with plans for a fishing trip. All is not lost though, as we still have our online activities.

## PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP

In lieu of meeting in person, the Scotland Photography Group meets online every Thursday evening, headed up by Shetland Isles resident Kev Bryant. He helps Members improve their photography skills by sharing his knowledge and experience through the online sessions. Kev is always on hand



**L to R: Shadow by Olivia Zambonini, and Water by Lorraine Anderson**

to support Members with their questions, whether they are about the best equipment they may wish to buy or use, the taking or editing of photographs, or just hints and tips for improving their skills.

Each week, Members agree on a subject for the following week's photographs and it's great to see how everyone is improving on their composition, editing and general photography skills.

Members have found a new love or reignited their old passion for photography, and Kev has been learning new skills too, such as how to use his smartphone for photography. The group is small but is always happy to welcome new Members – from complete beginners to the more experienced.

“Back in May, I was asked by [Outreach Officer] Emma Gration if I would be willing to participate in assisting a group of Members in Scotland who would like to improve their photography,” said Kev. “Although I’m only an amateur photographer, I agreed to help out and have really enjoyed the sessions. At each meeting a weekly challenge is set to take six images on a theme decided by the group.

“These themes often fall outside my usual interests, so I find myself challenged and having to think through my week’s photography. It’s a great way to improve or rethink your photography as well as meet people with a shared interest.”



Clockwise from above: Perspective by Kev Bryant, Animals by Ken De Soya, and Macro by Kev Bryant

### REMINISCENCE TALKS

Having asked Members if there was anything specific that they would like to do to commemorate Remembrance this year, Members in Scotland suggested that they would like to invite a guest speaker.

As it happened, Outreach Officer Emma Gration had met Sean from Titanic Honour and Glory, at a webinar a few weeks before. In ordinary times, Titanic Honour

and Glory runs group sessions that explore history through interactive talks by presenters in full costume, allowing participants to handle items and artefacts from the era.

Of course, due to the current pandemic the company has had to change its approach to incorporate online talks. Emma arranged for them to run a series of online talks for Scottish Members, beginning with one on the Titanic in

September, followed by discussions on WWI in October and WWII in November.

“The WWI talk was really well presented in an easy-to-understand format which revealed many interesting facts,” said Member Frank Toner. “The experience was greatly enhanced by the participation and questions from the attendees. In two words it was ‘really enjoyable!’”

*If you are interested in taking part in one of these historical talks please contact Emma Gration*

### BOOK GROUP

Our Scotland Book Group meets roughly once a month to discuss a book that was selected by the group at the previous meeting. Although the book choice is not always to everyone’s taste this can provide a good talking point in the meetings. It’s not essential to be online to take part as we also have members who submit their reviews by phone and text.

“I am grateful to Blesma for the book club,” says Blesma Widow Burnice Manderson. “It gives me a connection to real life.”

Looking ahead to the next few months, Emma is looking at different ideas for how Members can come together to celebrate Christmas within the current restrictions. As always, any suggestions for activities will be greatly received so please get in touch with Emma by email at [outreachscotland@blesma.org](mailto:outreachscotland@blesma.org) if you have any proposals.

**“The presenter is a lovely guy who has done his homework on the subject matter. It’s a pleasant way to pass an hour, that’s for sure!”**

**Ike Curran**

# An update from around the Branches

## WALSALL & DISTRICT BRANCH

Lockdown and the COVID-19 restrictions continue to make Branch life difficult as we have been unable to enjoy our usual activities such as lunches or outings from which we gain personal contact with friends. However, we do our best to keep in touch and, where necessary, keep spirits up.

One lady who always seems to be in good health and have great spirit is Nan Allen. Because she was experiencing mobility difficulties, Nan moved into a care home in Wolverhampton where she recently celebrated her 101st birthday. Sadly, we were not able to visit her there, but several of her friends in the Branch sent cards and gifts, and the staff at the home put on a party for her. When asked for an update they always say: “she is an amazing lady” and she truly is.

Jessie James is a popular member of the Branch and has become well known in Blesma. Unfortunately, Jessie has not been in the best of health lately. His wife, Mal, keeps us informed of his ups and downs, and we all hope he will soon be out and about again and feeling better.

Much of the email correspondence within the Branch concerns itself with football. Mike Gallagher is delighted that his beloved Leeds United gained promotion to the Premier League, where they are

doing well, and Martin Kettrick is equally as pleased that Stoke City managed to avoid relegation and remain in the Championship, where they are currently doing better than last season.

Sadly, we have said farewell to two of our Members – Bet Greenway and Ron Reaney – in recent months. Our condolences go to Ron’s widow, Beryl, who we hope to be able to visit when life eventually returns to normal.

For some Walsall Branch Members, life this year will not have been particularly enjoyable. If this applies to you and you are feeling a bit low, please feel free to give me a call to have a chat.

We very much hope that by the time the festive period arrives things will be better for all and that you are able to enjoy a happy Christmas with family and friends.

*Jim Keating*  
**President**

## GREAT YARMOUTH & LOWESTOFT BRANCH

Welcome to the Great Yarmouth & Lowestoft Branch update. We hope you are all keeping safe and well as we make our way through the coronavirus pandemic and the challenges it has brought to everyone this year.

When we do get the opportunity to meet, we regularly welcome staff from Blesma Chelmsford, with BSO Kevin Long, Outreach

Officer Darren Fuller, and National Outreach Coordinator Martin Gwillim joining us to share news about how HQ is supporting the Branch with initiatives such as the new Blesma Connects app.

Unfortunately, because of the ongoing situation with COVID-19, all our planned activities have either been cancelled or are on hold, but we continue to contact each other and to offer support where it is needed. We, like all other Branches, are missing face-to-face gatherings, but rest assured we will be back together as soon as it is safe for us all to do so.

In the meantime, we send our best wishes to all of the Blesma family as we prepare to face any challenges that Autumn and Winter bring.

Stay safe and well.

*Helen Cullen*  
**Branch Secretary**

## BOURNEMOUTH BRANCH

What do you write about when nothing has changed? Our neighbours in the Southampton Branch have cancelled their Christmas Lunch and, sadly, we have come to the same conclusion. Therefore, I doubt that we will have any meetings or social gatherings for the year 2020, including on Remembrance Day.

But there is some good news: the Branch has sponsored a tree at WMH (Bournemouth War



**Outreach Officer Darren Fuller shares initiatives like the Blesma app**

Memorial Homes) so we will at least have a focal point for our own personal Act of Remembrance. If any Members would like to plant a cross in remembrance of their loved ones who served, please let me know and I will arrange it and publish a photograph in the next issue of the Bulletin.

Members of the Branch have kept in close contact with one another since lockdown and continue to do so, aided and supported by BSO Steve Fraser and Outreach Officer Sarah Payne. We are twice blessed with our support team. Sarah has organised all sorts of things: we are currently making poppies for November, we have had 'felt' penguins, virtual cream teas, a VJ Day quiz, and a

very interesting talk on Antarctica where I completed two 'seasons' on HMS Protector in the mid-60s. I would recommend that anyone who is online should attend one of Sarah's online events.

I would also ask all our Members to make sure they have their flu jab this year, doubly important in these times.

Anywhere north of Ringwood is considered to be in the North of England to most Members of our Branch, and we all send our very best wishes to all our fellow Blesma Members in the North at this torrid time.

Wear a mask, keep your distance, wash your hands, and keep safe.

**Peter Sherston-Baker**  
*Chairman*

## **SOUTHAMPTON, WINCHESTER AND DISTRICT**

As you will all appreciate, one sad effect of the COVID-19 virus is to reduce all Branch activities, including our Summer social activities and the outings on the boat, the Alison Macgregor.

However, the Branch Committee has been very active when it has come to keeping in touch with all our Members and Widows, either by email or telephone, should any problem arise.

Sadly, one of our Widows, Doris Elizabeth Gallant, passed away on 27 July. The Branch sent its condolences to her daughter, Mary Light. May she rest in peace.

We are also pleased to receive two new Members: Ben Cartwright and Ryan Thomas, the latter is still serving in the Royal Navy. We hope they enjoy their time with us when normal activities resume.

The Branch would also like to thank Pat Donnachie (BSO(S)), Andy Barlow GM (Outreach Officer (S)) and Blesma HQ for all their support. This came to the fore when one of our Widows had a problem at home which required some expenditure and as the bill could be sent electronically, the lady was paid within a week.

The highlight of the period was the fact that one of our Widows, Olwyn Leng, celebrated her 100th birthday on 20 July. Naturally, there was a family gathering (suitably spaced), along with the normal communication from Her Majesty, The Queen. It was a great pleasure that myself and our Welfare Rep, Jacquie Brodrick, were asked to call.

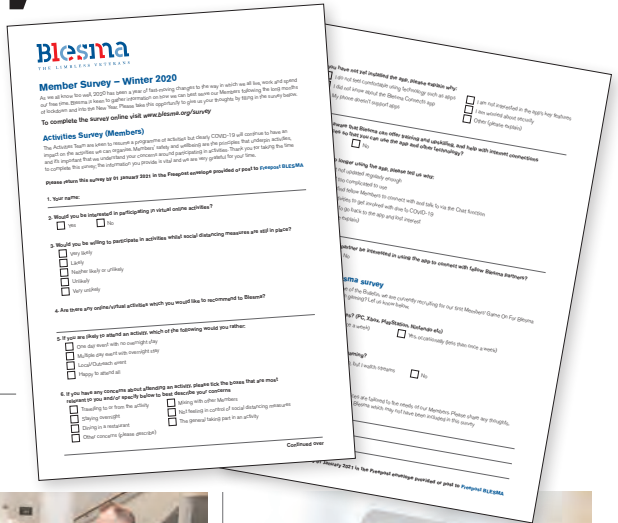
**Stephen Coltman, Honorary Secretary**

# Members' survey: Tell us what you think

**A**s we all know too well, 2020 has been a year of fast-moving changes to the way in which we all live, work and spend our free time. Blesma is keen to gather information on how we can best serve our Members following the long months of lockdown and into the New Year.

Please take the opportunity to give us your thoughts by filling in the Members' survey that has been inserted into this issue of the Bulletin.

You can also complete the survey online at [www.blesma.org/survey](http://www.blesma.org/survey)



## ACTIVITIES SURVEY

The Activities Team are keen to resume a programme of activities but COVID-19 will continue to have an impact on the activities we can organise. Members' safety and wellbeing are the principles that underpin activities, and it's important that we understand your concerns around participating in activities.



## MEMBERS' WEEKEND AND AGM 2021

This year's Members' Weekend had to be cancelled due to COVID-19, and the AGM took place online. We're already planning Members' Weekend 2021 (which will run from 12-14 June) but we may have to cancel the event nearer the time, depending on the Government's COVID-19 guidance, and hold an online AGM. Please let us know your thoughts about next year's event.



## BLESMA CONNECTS

It has been eight months since the launch of the Blesma Connects app, and we're keen to understand how Members are using it. Please take the time to answer the questions about Blesma Connects so we can improve the app and make it even more useful for you in the future.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey; the information you provide is vital and we are very grateful for your time.

# Members' Weekend 2021

**Date:** 12-14 June 2021  
**Venue:** TBC

**T**his year's Members' Weekend had to be cancelled because of COVID-19, but plans are underway to make sure next year's event is bigger and brighter than ever. If you would like to come along to meet old friends and make some new ones, find out what Blesma Members have been up to, and have your say on what Blesma should be doing to support Members in the future, please put the date in your diary and apply today using the application form that has been inserted into this issue of the Bulletin. As always, the event is free to Ordinary and Associate Members, as well as their partners or carers.



# Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care

**W**elcome to the Bulletin's regular section on the benefits system. As well as highlighting some useful information regarding the benefits system, on occasion 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 (contact details can be found on p38). Alternatively, you can contact Liz Watling in the Independence and Wellbeing team by email at [iwabenefits@blesma.org](mailto:iwabenefits@blesma.org) or by calling her on 020 8548 3516.

## COVID-19 AND BENEFITS

In the last Bulletin we highlighted some changes to the benefits system as a result of COVID-19. Most of these changes remain in place. Most notably for our Members, this is the change to the assessment process for disability benefits, or the Work Capability Assessment for those who are unable to work due to ill health or disability.

Previously, these assessments would either be carried out on the paper-based evidence, or a face-to-face assessment would be required. As the face-to-face assessments are currently no longer possible, any claims for these benefits that are unable to have a paper-based decision will now have a telephone assessment. If you are requested to have a telephone assessment, it is possible to have someone on the call with you. If you require your Blesma Support Officer to assist by being on the call, please contact them as soon as possible to request this, as you will need to give the assessment provider and your Blesma Support Officer time to make the arrangements for a third party to take part.

## SOCIAL SECURITY SCOTLAND

We have previously reported on changes to the benefits system in Scotland as the Scottish Government has been given devolved powers for some benefits. This

includes the Personal Independence Payment and Attendance Allowance.

The planning for the transfer of these two benefits to Scotland's Disability Assistance should have been well underway by now. However, due to COVID-19, this has been delayed. Social Security Scotland is now reworking its timetable. The delay has been caused by the pressures on staffing, as many members of staff have been redirected to join other teams where there has been an increase in demand for benefit claims.

There also needs to be an availability of healthcare professionals to undertake the disability assessments that support the benefit decisions, and there has obviously been an impact on the availability of these staff in recent months.

Blesma remains a stakeholder for engagement with Social Security Scotland and we will update our Scottish Members once we have the revised timetable. In the meantime, our Scottish Members who are receiving Personal Independence Payment and Attendance Allowance remain the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions.

## HELP WITH HEATING COSTS

Now that the seasons have changed and the colder weather will be with us for some months to come, we can highlight some of the ways in which the Government can support you with your heating costs. There are a number of initiatives, however entitlement to the support can depend on age or income.

## WINTER FUEL PAYMENT

This is an annual lump sum payment of between £100 and £300 to help pensioners with heating costs. You qualify for a Winter Fuel Payment if both the following apply:

- You were born before 05 October 1954
- You have lived in the UK for at least one day during the week of 21-27 September 2020 (known as the qualifying week)



If you did not live in the UK during the qualifying week you might still get the payment if both the following apply:

- You live in Switzerland or a European Economic Area country
- You have a genuine link with the UK social security system, such as having lived or worked in the UK for most of your life

You cannot receive the payment if you live in Cyprus, France, Gibraltar, Greece, Malta, Portugal, or Spain because the average winter temperature is higher than the warmest region of the UK. You will not qualify if you meet one of the following excluding conditions:

- You are in hospital getting free treatment for more than a year
- You lived in a care home for the whole time between 29 June and 27 September 2020, and received Pension Credit, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, or income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- You were in prison for the whole week between 21-27 September 2020
- You need permission to enter the UK and your granted leave states that you cannot claim public funds

### How to claim

You should automatically receive a payment without making a claim if either:

- You received a payment last year and your circumstances have not changed
- You are getting State Pension or another social security benefit (excluding Child Benefit, Universal Credit, Council Tax Reduction, and Housing Benefit)

For those who received a payment last year there has been a change in the way you are notified:

- You will receive a letter around three weeks before your payment. These letters will be sent between mid-October and November

- Your bank statement showing the payment will have the reference 'DWP Winter Fuel'

If you are not entitled to an automatic payment but still meet the criteria, you must make a claim. For a claim form, call 0800 731 0160. The form must be received by the Winter Fuel Payment Centre by 31 March 2021.

If you are entitled to a Winter Fuel Payment and your only government-paid income is from a War Pension or War Widows Pension, your Winter Fuel Payment will be processed by Veterans UK.

### WARM HOME DISCOUNT SCHEME

This is a £140 credit to your electricity bill. You can also qualify if you use a pre-pay or pay as you go electricity meter. There are two ways to qualify for the Warm Home Discount Scheme:

- You get the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit – known as the 'core group'
- You are on a low income and meet your energy supplier's criteria for the scheme – known as the 'broader group'

### How to claim CORE GROUP

You qualify for the discount if, on 05 July 2020, all of the following applied:

- Your electricity supplier was part of the scheme
- Your name (or your partner's) was on the bill
- You were getting the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit

If you qualify for the core group, you should receive a letter between October and December 2020 telling you how to get the discount. Your letter will inform you as to whether you need to call a helpline by 26 February 2021 to confirm your details. Your electricity supplier will apply your discount to your bill by 31 March 2021.

## Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care

If you are eligible for the core group and do not receive a letter, contact the Warm Home Discount Team on 0800 731 0214.

### BROADER GROUP

You may be able to apply directly to your electricity supplier for help if you do not qualify under the core group rules. You may qualify if, on 05 July 2020, all of the following applied:

- You were on a low income
- You received certain means-tested benefits
- Your electricity supplier was part of the scheme
- Your name (or your partner's) was on the bill

Your electricity supplier decides its own criteria for the scheme. Do not contact the Warm Home Discount Scheme. Check with your supplier to see if it is part of the scheme, if you are eligible, and how to apply. If entitled, your electricity supplier will apply your discount to your bill by 31 March 2021.

### COLD WEATHER PAYMENT

This is an automatic payment of £25 for each qualifying week (between 01 November and 31 March) if the average temperature forecast over seven consecutive days at the designated weather station for your area is 0°C or lower and you have been awarded one of the following benefits:

- Pension Credit
- Income Support or income-based Jobs Seeker's Allowance and you have either:
  - A disability or pensioner premium
  - A disabled child
  - Child Tax Credit that includes a disability or severe disability element
  - A child aged under five living with you
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance and you are in either the work related activity group or support group. If you are not in either group, you may get a payment if you have either:

- A severe or enhanced disability premium
- A pensioner premium
- A disabled child
- Child Tax Credit that includes a disability or severe disability element
- A child aged under five living with you
- Universal Credit, as long as you are not employed or self-employed, and you have either:
  - A limited capability for work element
  - A disabled child element (whether you are employed or not)
  - A child aged under five living with you
- Support for mortgage interest

You are not entitled to a Cold Weather Payment if you are living in a care home. You do not need to make a claim for a Cold Weather Payment. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should automatically pay you if you qualify, as it will be aware of your means-tested benefit entitlement.

### CHALLENGING AN EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE DECISION

When a claimant wishes to challenge their benefit decision, they first have to request a mandatory reconsideration. This is where the Department for Work and Pensions will review its decision 'in house'. If the claimant is not satisfied with the result of the mandatory reconsideration, they can appeal to an independent tribunal.

During the mandatory reconsideration stage, no payment of Employment and Support Allowance could be received. However, once an appeal was requested, then the claimant could have payment of the benefit.

On 24 July 2020, a tribunal ruled that the non-payment for some claimants of income-related Employment and Support Allowance while waiting for a mandatory reconsideration is unlawful as the gap in payment is deemed to be unfair.

You no longer need to go through the mandatory reconsideration process and instead can go straight to appeal if:

- You are getting income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- You are appealing a decision that says you are fit for work

The decision that you are fit for work is not based on you having failed to return your ESA50 questionnaire or having failed to attend an assessment. It is either:

- The first time you have been found fit for work at an assessment or
- You have been found fit for work at a previous assessment but since then have had an assessment where you were found to have limited capacity for work

If this criteria is met, you are now able to go straight to appeal and can therefore continue to receive payment of Employment and Support Allowance (known as Payment Pending Appeal).

You can still ask for the Department for Work and Pensions to review its decision, and both options can be run simultaneously. There will be a small number of claimants who can now retrospectively go straight to appeal. These will be claimants who had their first fit for work decision after the tribunal decision of 24 July 2020. The DWP will contact these claimants.

## TV LICENCE

### Are you aged 75 or over?

Previously, those over 75 years of age were able to apply for a free TV licence. It is now no longer possible to be automatically entitled to a free TV licence if you are over the age of 75.

In August 2020, the BBC introduced a new scheme that offers some over-75 households, who are on a low income, a free TV licence.

### You can get a free TV licence if:

- You, as the licence holder, are 75 years or older and
- You, or your partner living at the same address, receive Pension Credit

**To claim your free TV licence call 0300 790 6117 or visit [www.tvlicensing.co.uk](http://www.tvlicensing.co.uk)**

### Are you blind (severely sight impaired)?

If you are blind (severely sight impaired) you are eligible to apply for a 50% concession. Your licence will also cover anyone who lives with you. If you are partially sighted (sight impaired) you are not eligible.

To qualify, you will need to evidence that you are certified as blind (severely sight impaired) by providing one of the following:

- CVI (Certificate of Visual Impairment)
- BD8 Certificate
- A certificate or document issued by a Local Authority that shows you are registered as blind (severely sight impaired)
- A copy of a certificate from an ophthalmologist (eye surgeon) stating that you are blind (severely sight impaired)

**For more information, please call 0300 790 6117 or visit [www.tvlicensing.co.uk](http://www.tvlicensing.co.uk). To request the information in an accessible format (email, Braille, large print, or audio) please call 0300 790 6076**

QUIZ ANSWERS

# Answers to the Summer issue quizzes

EASY, TO GET YOU STARTED...

6	9	8	1	7	2	3	5	4
1	5	3	8	9	4	6	7	2
7	4	2	3	5	6	1	9	8
5	3	9	4	6	1	2	8	7
2	7	1	5	8	3	9	4	6
8	6	4	9	2	7	5	3	1
4	8	5	2	1	9	7	6	3
9	1	6	7	3	8	4	2	5
3	2	7	6	4	5	8	1	9

MEDIUM, TEST YOURSELF

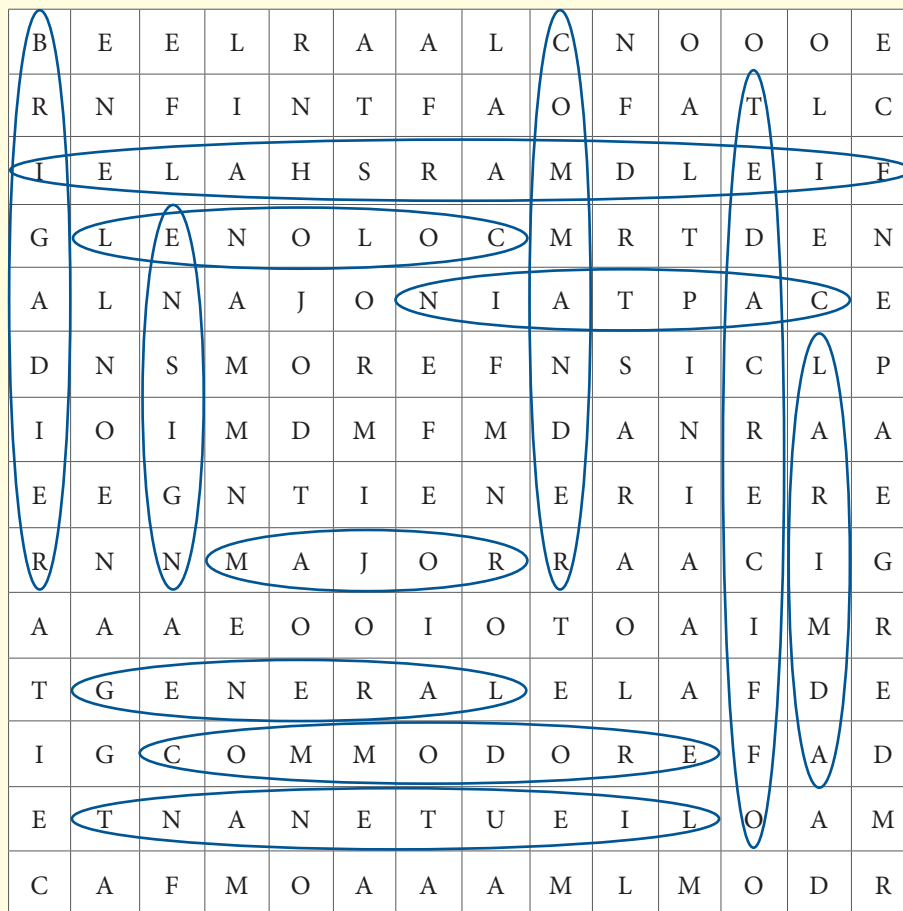
9	4	7	5	8	6	1	3	2
6	3	8	2	1	9	5	7	4
1	2	5	7	4	3	9	8	6
4	5	1	8	9	7	2	6	3
8	7	3	6	2	5	4	9	1
2	6	9	1	3	4	8	5	7
5	1	2	3	7	8	6	4	9
7	9	6	4	5	2	3	1	8
3	8	4	9	6	1	7	2	5

HARD, ONLY FOR THE BRAVE!

1	2	7	5	6	9	4	3	8
3	5	9	8	2	4	1	7	6
4	8	6	1	3	7	9	2	5
9	3	2	7	8	5	6	4	1
8	7	4	9	1	6	3	5	2
6	1	5	3	4	2	7	8	9
7	6	3	2	5	1	8	9	4
2	4	8	6	9	3	5	1	7
5	9	1	4	7	8	2	6	3

Credit: Websudoku.com

QUIZ ANSWERS



**GENERAL  
ADMIRAL  
COMMANDER  
MAJOR**

**LIEUTENANT  
CAPTAIN  
ENSIGN  
FIELDMARSHAL**

**COLONEL  
BRIGADIER  
COMMODORE  
OFFICER CADET**

**CROSSWORD PUZZLE ANSWERS**

**ACROSS**

- 2. Blesmag
- 4. Nick Beighton
- 8. Richard
- 14. Avro Vulcan
- 16. Italy
- 17. Challenger

- 18. Queen Elizabeth class
- 19. Chadwell Heath
- 20. Heather
- 21. Dame Kelly Holmes
- 23. Darren Swift

**DOWN**

- 2. Tangier
- 3. Stoke Mandeville
- 5. Chelmsford
- 6. Waterloo
- 7. Bryant
- 9. Waller

- 10. The Conqueror
- 11. Lulworth
- 12. Martin Hewitt
- 13. Osseointegration
- 15. Dwight D Eisenhower
- 22. DIY SOS

## CONTACT DETAILS

# Useful contact numbers across the Association

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<b>BLESMA SUPPORT OFFICERS</b>			
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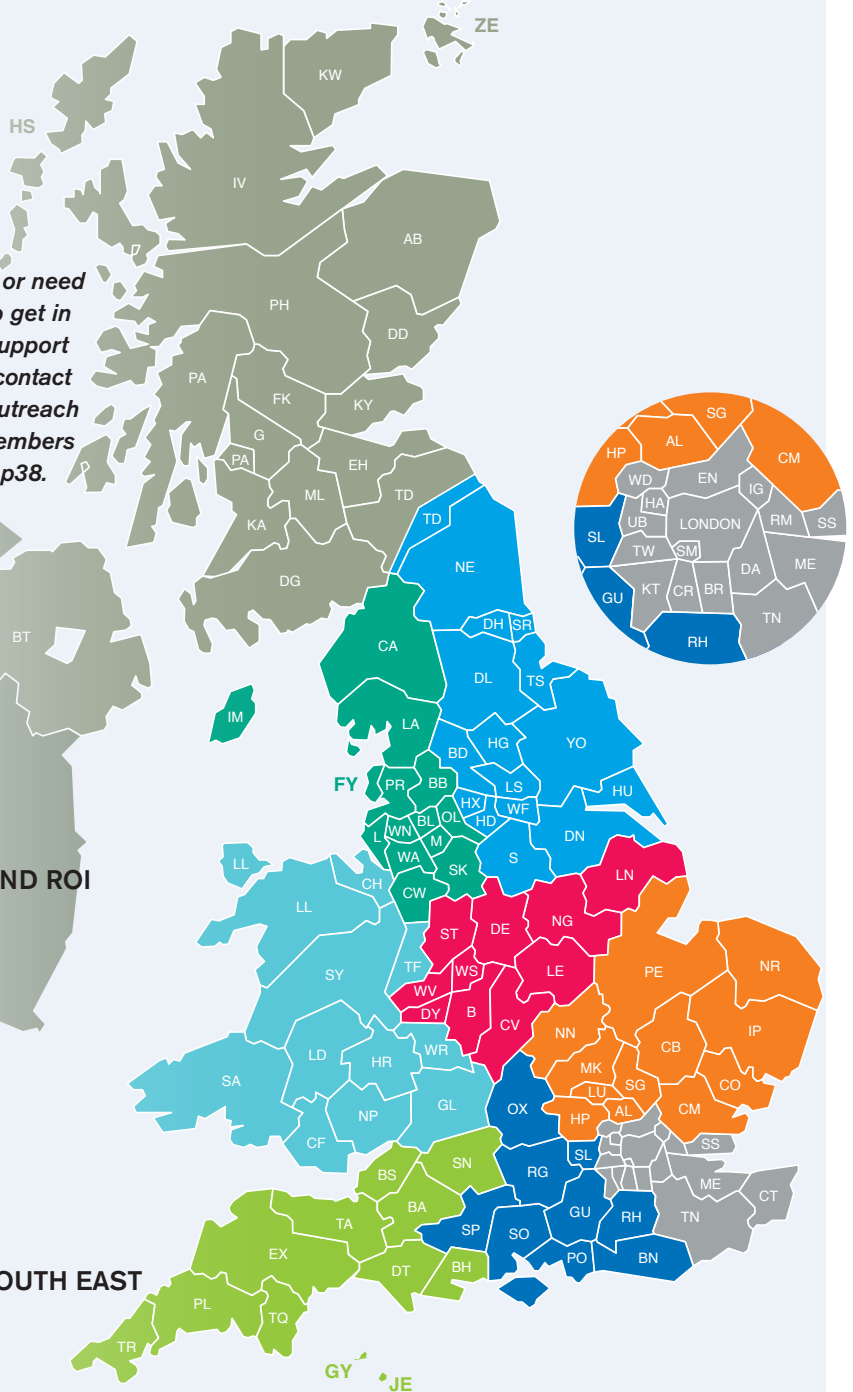
TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
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THE ASSOCIATION

# 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 p38.*

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



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