

Members' Weekend 2019

Heythrop Park Resort, Oxfordshire



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Members' Weekend 2019: fun, friendships, and a new venue

When we first arrived we thought: 'Wow! It's Downton Abbey!'" says Colin Branch as he stands in glorious sunshine, taking in the view of Heythrop Park, the venue for this year's Members' Weekend. "The grounds are just outstanding, beautiful to walk around, and the hotel is great, too."

The magnificent 18th century country pile certainly has a rarified air and the venue, new for this year's Weekend, which was held between 08-10 June, was a hit with those who attended. Now a much-loved part of the social calendar, the Weekend, as ever, allowed Members to catch up with old friends, and make new ones, too.

After arriving on the Saturday afternoon, many enjoyed watching the presentation by Making Generation R (MGR), Blesma's storytelling project that helps train Members to tell their unique stories in educational settings. Then it was time for the Service of Remembrance, which included a pitch-perfect rendition of *The Last Post* by two buglers from *The Rifles*.

Later in the afternoon there was time to enjoy some of what Heythrop Park has to offer – including a golf course, swimming pool, spa, gardens, snooker, and much more. The bar was full of fun, camaraderie and laughter before the evening's formal meal, where a number of Awards were handed out to Members who had made a particularly significant impression during the year. (Read more about the recipients in the Summer issue of the *Bulletin*, which will be published later this month.)



The following day began with the AGM, and Trustee approval for an extension to the MGR programme, as well as the continuation of the good work of the nine regional Outreach Officers.

A series of talks followed; among the most popular was a presentation by Martin Hewitt, who scaled Mount Everest this year as part of the Adaptive Grand Slam (see p30 of the main issue). A personal speech by Kevin Worsley was well received, in which he told how Blesma's Fitness and Wellbeing Retreat, and PhotoVoice course have helped his mental health. Meanwhile, Stewart Harris spoke about the virtues of golf, and Alex Krol gave Members advice on how to pitch an activity to Blesma.

Sunday afternoon was dedicated to trying new things. Members rode a variety of bikes, while others took part in crossbow and pistol shooting.

The driving range was packed with experienced golfers and novices alike, while in the main building Members marvelled at the photography course's exhibits and learned to paint, and to speak with more confidence.

The sun played along for most of the afternoon before the Weekend concluded with a barbecue and, for those with the stamina, a few more drinks at the bar. It was the perfect conclusion to an excellent weekend.

"We've had a wonderful time," concluded Ann Siddens, who was attending her first Members' Weekend with husband Peter. "It's been great attending the meal and meeting new people together, but we also got to split up and do different activities, which is a really nice element of the Weekend. We'd love to come back next year."

See you there!



Words: Nick Moore Photography: Andy Bate, Brian Chenier



A word from the Chairman: Sir Adrian Bradshaw



General Sir Adrian Bradshaw reflects on his second full year as the Association's National Chairman

What is it that makes the Members' Weekend so important?

The Weekend is about communication and getting together to talk about all sorts of things. It's about having fun, but also airing opinions and exposing them to the Trustees. If Members have something on their mind, it can be discussed – they'll get an honest and straightforward response from the Board. It's been quite a week, coming after the 75th anniversary of D-Day. I hope that has reminded the nation the debt it owes to veterans as a whole.

During your address you stressed that the Board of Trustees always has a robust debate on behalf of Members...

It happens at every board meeting I sit on. Opinions are always varied when it comes to the issues we face. I'm very satisfied on the Members' behalf that the Board analyses these problems in a very diligent manner. We have the right blend of skills to make judgements on how we spend money, what we do with our property, how we address the moral, ethical and legal issues that we face, and how we deal with regulation and legislation.

It's been an exciting year, with the nine new Outreach Officers starting work... An opportunity came up for us to enliven local connections and activities, including volunteers, much

as the Branches did in the past. Local delivery is very important. The Board assessed that this initiative has had a positive impact to date and has made the decision that the programme will continue into the foreseeable future.

The Association is moving forward positively, then...

Yes, and on behalf of the Board, I want to say how incredibly hard our Chief Executive, Barry Le Grys, works for

"IF MEMBERS HAVE SOMETHING ON THEIR MIND, THEY'LL GET AN HONEST AND STRAIGHTFORWARD RESPONSE FROM THE BOARD"

Blesma's interests, as well as for the reputation of this organisation. The Association, against all the measures by which military charities are judged, is right at the top. That's because we have a Chief Executive, and a staff, who dig out on the Members' behalf every single day.

There's a Board vacancy coming up. You are keen for any Member who feels they have the time and skills to put themselves forward?

Yes. We are always looking for new people who want to throw their hat into the ring. For those who feel they would like to do a bit more for their organisation, I would encourage them to do just that. We certainly don't want to get to a situation where the membership is not fully or properly represented.





The Chief Executive: Barry Le Grys



Chief Executive Barry Le Grys gave a presentation that will have spread reassurance amongst the membership: the charity is in an extremely sound financial position

Blesma has remained financially robust, but has done this whilst greatly increasing the amount of money it spends on services that benefit Members directly...

That's right. Membership services are now 75 per cent of our spend. Meanwhile, our spend on grants has gone up by 50 per cent over the last four years, and we anticipate spending even more on grants as we continue to look after people who want to stay in their own homes. The way the reserves are apportioned, the Board plans to increase spending by up to 20 per cent but will still hold back money for contingency, so if the unforeseen happens in terms of another conflict, we can act immediately.

The Trustees asked you to review the differences in the Association, in terms of numbers, between 2009 and 2019. What were the big takeaways?

Blesma's income has increased over the course of the last decade, up considerably from 2009, but so is our expenditure. Our balance sheet was between £16-£17 million then, whilst now it is more than £30 million. The ratio of what we spend is not dissimilar, so we are still in balance and in a stable position. We no longer have area representation, the last two



closed last year, and the number of Branches has fallen from 18 to seven. However, the number of Blesma Support Officers has gone up from six to 10 and we also have nine new Outreach Officers where we previously didn't have any.

What else has changed when it comes to Blesma's spending?

We spend two-and-a-half times more on welfare than we did in 2009, and we give two-and-a-half times more in grants. What we spend on activities, both nationally and regionally, has gone up sevenfold, and the number of participants on activities has gone up fivefold. In that same period, our overheads have risen by two per cent.

Your workload has changed, too...

Our compliance workload has gone up; we are now responsible to three regulatory authorities and four devolved administrations, where previously there was just one of each.

How might the Association change over the next few decades?

Membership has dropped, but not as significantly as had been forecast. We have just over 3,000 Members now, and it is anticipated that in 2028, we will have between 2,500 and 3,000.



The rise and rise of Making Generation R

Making Generation R (MGR) has been an overwhelming success ever since it was established as the Blesma Community Programme in 2016.

Attendees at Members' Weekend were given an insight into why – and then encouraged to sign up themselves.

To date, some 60 Members have been trained to put together a gripping monologue using their inspiring life stories before performing it publicly, as paid work, mainly in schools. By the end of the summer, more than 50,000 young people will have been reached and encouraged to develop their own resilience by exploring the various themes brought up by the talks.

The programme has been so well-received that Blesma's Board of Trustees voted to extend the funding for another year: MGR now aims to train 20 more Members in 2019/20, and reach an additional 20,000 youngsters.

"Members come to London and take part in a five-day intensive training programme where they learn skills in public speaking," explained trainer Tuey Critchfield. "They learn to craft a 20-minute story and, at the end of the week, share it on a West End stage with other Members. Then, they can take their story out to a variety of educational settings across the UK."

Blesma Member Darren Swift, an experienced actor with an extraordinary story about losing his legs to a bomb in Northern Ireland, has been involved with the project right from the start.

"Having more people on board will be phenomenal and the variety of



Talks by Swift (left) and Tom Penny (below) left the audience stunned

stories involved is fantastic," he says. "There are conflict and non-conflict tales from different people of different ages. We all approach our narratives differently. I can be a bit of a geezer, while someone else might be quieter. But however you tell your story, the audience still ends up right there with you. It's awesome to see Members who come on the course thinking they're not good at speaking going from strength to strength. I see Members change a lot during their time with us."

MGR is branching out, too: a series of podcasts has been released in which a number of Members meet and swap personal stories with celebrities, whilst the MGR tutors are also running shorter Speaking With Confidence workshops around the country (see p08 of this supplement for more).

To find out more about MGR, visit www.blesma.org/making-generation-r or speak to your BSO

The life of a military bugler: from D-Day to Members' Weekend

The Service of Remembrance, traditionally held on the Saturday afternoon, has become an important part of Members' Weekend. This year was made more special than ever as two buglers – serving soldiers from The Rifles – were on hand to play a stirring rendition of *The Last Post*.

Even more poignant was the fact that just two days earlier, Rifleman Kieran Rowley and Michael Bailey had played at the official D-Day commemorations in Normandy. The duo explain more about their unique role, and the privilege of playing for injured veterans...

How did you get into playing the bugle at military functions?

Kieran: I joined The Rifles and did Assault Pioneer

training, which means you also do the bugle course to be able to carry on regimental tradition and history. You do six months in Catterick at the Army School of Ceremonial, which is very interesting. I wasn't musical at all when I began the course, so I found it quite hard to pick up. I must have sounded terrible on day one!

Michael: I'm from Antigua and was originally recruited for track and field. I was nervous as a new bugler – you don't want to mess up!



Tell us about some of the engagements you've played at...

Michael: Two days ago we were in Normandy, playing at the D-Day 75 commemoration. I played *The Last Post* on a bridge, alone, and I saw some of the elderly veterans getting emotional. It was very hard for me to see the old guys tearing up. It was raw. You could see the feelings they still had for the guys they had lost. That was a big deal.

Kieran: It was very emotional. If anyone deserves our respect, it's them. None

of us would be here without them. I've also played at England rugby matches, and for the Queen in Northern Ireland. Prince Philip was staring right at me, so I thought I'd look at Her Majesty because it might make me less nervous. That didn't work! The pressure was so high I pretty much passed out.

What's it like playing for Blesma Members?

Kieran: It's a real honour. I'm even more nervous playing in front of a military crowd like this because everyone knows what they are listening for! Get it wrong here and they're not going to be happy! I'm extremely proud to play for injured veterans; they have sacrificed so much.

Michael: Yes, I feel nervous but honoured because you've got a true military crowd

here. We practice every day, so we get better all the time. Playing for Blesma Members is a big deal for us.



Get up, get out, and get active with a Blesma activity

Speaking With Confidence

What do you think is the number one fear worldwide? You might think it's spiders, snakes or heights, but it is, in fact, public speaking.

"According to surveys, people are more afraid of making a speech than they are of death," says Tuey Critchfield from The Drive Project, long-standing partners of Blesma on the Making Generation R programme.

MGR has been very well received by Blesma Members since its inception, but not everyone can spare the time to take part in a week's worth of drama training in London. That fact gave the MGR trainers an idea: why not put together a one-day event that would be held at a number of venues around the UK, which could impart some of the fantastic speaking skills that are taught on MGR? And so the Speaking With Confidence course was born.

"The success of Making Generation R has allowed us to branch out, and so far we've completed five regional workshops," explains Tuey, who was on hand to help run a two-hour taster session over the Weekend. "The focus of Members' Weekend was to look at methods to control your nerves and calm down before you start speaking in public.

"We concentrate on things you can do beforehand that can benefit you massively. These include breathing techniques, shaking out tension,



Above: Sharon Farley-Mason learns to speak with confidence under the watchful eye of course tutor Phil (left)

vocal exercises, and meditation. You can even do physical exercise before a talk to get rid of all the extra adrenaline."

The group of Members and their spouses who took part had a variety of reasons for wanting to gain more confidence. Among them was Sharon Farley-Mason (above). "I've got a talk to give in July to a big disability group in Stockport, and I'm pretty nervous, so the techniques we've been going through today will be massively

helpful," she says. "We've learned what confidence looks like – how to project yourself, how to walk into a room, how to read an audience... I will definitely apply these techniques and use them both in my talk and more widely in my life. My husband has done Making Generation R, and it's changed him as a person. He holds himself differently and talks differently to people now. He is more confident and happy. So these techniques really work!"



Painting: Working in watercolour

It's not often that Oscar Wilde is quoted at Members' Weekend, but former Royal Marine Ian Lloyd is passionate about showing that military personnel have a creative side, too. Wilde's observation that "art begins where imitation ends" guides Ian when he teaches painting, and an increasing number of Members are discovering or reconnecting with a love of portraiture and watercolours during what is the charity's most artistic year yet.

A large group signed up for Ian's painting activity, and he guided them through the process of applying oil to canvas, with each Member recreating a scene of a silhouetted soldier.

"Don't be a slave to veracity is what I always advise," says Ian, who suffered an amputation following an accident 11 years ago. "In the Services, attention

to detail is important. In art, it's less so. Just get it on paper, things don't have to be perfect!"

"By the end of the afternoon, everyone on the course will have produced a picture not dissimilar to the one I've done. But you have to allow art to take its own course. Open up and enjoy it."

Ian began drawing when he was in the Marines and, since discovering Blesma two-and-a-half years ago, he



has established a regular Blesma art group in the South West.

"I wish I'd found Blesma earlier because it's turned my life around. I hope that through my love of art I can turn other people's lives around, too," he says. "I've led a trip to Kendal and we had a week travelling around the Somerset countryside making art. I'm a watercolourist, but I've also got out of my comfort zone after doing a portrait painting course. I ended up using black and white paint, and a square format. It was all new."

Our new painters seemed inspired once the results had been revealed, too. "I'm great at painting skirting boards but not so good at watercolours," laughs Ann Siddens. "But Ian has got us all going. I might do some more painting when I get back home."



“I USED A LOT OF WEAPONRY WHILST SERVING, BUT NEVER A CROSSBOW. I'D LIKE TO GIVE IT ANOTHER GO SOMETIME”



Crossbows and pistols

Everyone who has served in the military reckons they've got an eye for a shot – and on the lavish grounds of Heythrop Park, outside the 18th century country house itself, Members put their bragging to the test.

Regiments battle regiments for the best scores using crossbows and pistols, and some couples have mini-domestics as they vie for family supremacy.

“That always happens – everybody wants to beat their mate, girlfriend

or husband,” explains Jordan Mee, from the corporate team building company running the event. “That makes it great fun. These pistols and crossbows are easy to get started on, and people really enjoy them, but it does take some real skill to get good at them. I've got to say this military lot and their partners are pretty good.”

Brian Chapman, who served with the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters, is impressed. He did pretty

well – which is perhaps just as well considering that he was a sniper instructor for many years. “I've never fired a crossbow in my life before, but it's quite a good bit of kit,” he says. “I suppose the competitive nature in you comes out when you are doing this. I had the top score in the pistol, which isn't bad, because I haven't fired anything at all since 1991. This has been awesome, and having it on these grounds is also very special – it's a beautiful place.”

Brian Wadey, who served with the Royal Logistic Corps, agrees. “That was a lot of fun,” he says. “I do a lot of archery, but this was something new for me, and trying new activities is one of the great things about Members' Weekend. I used a lot of weaponry whilst serving, but never a crossbow! The way you use the sights is very interesting – it's quite hard lining up the red dot and taking aim. I'd like to give it another go sometime.”



PhotoVoice

Blesma has been running courses with the charity PhotoVoice over the last year to allow Members' to tell their stories both visually and through accompanying captions.

"We help people use photography as a tool of self expression and self advocacy," explains Tom Elkins from PhotoVoice. "With Blesma, we've run three different workshops this year, in Durham, Nottingham and Winchester.

"It's been an amazing privilege to hear and share the Members' stories, and to see the fantastic ways they're talking about their lives through imagery. Their captions have been very powerful and inspiring.

"Working with Blesma Members is fascinating and I think they have been incredibly brave in the things they've chosen to show us. I've been moved by their pictures, and we are hoping to exhibit them at our offices in London."

Jesse James was proud to display his photographs. "Exhibiting our work has been brilliant. I've learned how to take a photograph technically, but I've also learned how to tell *my* story because nobody else can tell it. My pictures touch on a lot of things, but they are mainly about my family and Nottingham. The course I went on was based there, but it's also where I'm from, and where I'd quite like to move back to. I've learned a lot, and I think the established photographers also learn something. And, as with all Blesma activities, I've enjoyed seeing old friends and forming a bond with new acquaintances, too."



Driving force:
Matty Woollard gets a bit of practice in on the driving range

Golf: home on the driving range

Golf suffers from some snobbish stereotypes, reckons Stewart Harris, but it is, he says, "the most inclusive sport on the planet. I can go to any club in the world with three other Members, and we don't need anything special to play."

Stewart, who served with the First Battalion Welsh Guards, is on a mission to get more Blesma folk swinging clubs, starting at Members' Weekend.

"It's great to see people giving it a go. I was forced into golf because I was in a mental health unit in Wales, and gave it a go just to get out of the place!

But then I fell in love with the game. It's great, because the actual playing is just 10 per cent of it. The rest is fresh air, exercise, banter and socialising. It's a good way to get people having a chat. We might not meet up for tea and sticky buns, but if we've got the chance to play golf, it serves the same purpose."

Stewart has been on a number of Blesma golfing trips, including to Portugal and Florida. "We got spoiled rotten, and it is a joy to play with other Members," he says. "Anyone can go. We'd like to get more women involved, because we don't want to fall into the stereotype of golf as a man's thing. Everyone is truly welcome."

Steve Fisher, playing in a wheelchair, and his partner Hannah certainly enjoyed the taster session. "It was great seeing Steve play, because he thought he wouldn't be able to do it," says Hannah. "And I've got a set of clubs at my parent's house, so I might just dig them out after this."





Cycling: getting back in the saddle

Blesma already has a very healthy cycling community, and runs a number of trips all across the UK and further afield every year – but the Association is always trying to get more recruits in the saddle, allowing them to reap the health benefits and discover a new-found sense of freedom.

To help with that, recent Members' Weekends have included the chance to try a wide range of bikes in conjunction with York-based group Get Cycling. They are specialists in adaptive bikes; from hand cycles to recumbent trikes, wheelchair tandems to fold-away cycles, that can get anyone mobile.

“We have a range of products, and we aim to get anybody on a bike,

regardless of their disability – and we haven't failed yet!” says Chris Ironton from Get Cycling. “We also refurbish bikes and trikes because new machines can be expensive. So any Member can give these bikes a go, or come and talk to us about their needs.”

It's certainly a hit at Heythrop Park as a variety of Members bomb around the carefully-cut lawns at high speed. “I love working with Blesma Members because everyone here gets properly involved,” says Chris. “This is our third Members' Weekend, and we have also been running an Introduction to Cycling weekend in York for Blesma for the last five years. I love it when I see someone back on a bike for the

first time in years. It makes people happy, and it's great to see them smile. That's why I do this job!”

One man with a grin on his face is Mark Barton, a relatively recent amputee, who is cutting around on a hand bike. “It feels really good to be back riding,” he says. “I used to do a lot of cross country mountain biking so a hand bike is very different from what I've been used to.

“I've lost fitness and muscle since my amputation, and doing this would strengthen me up. It would also be a great way of getting around, and there's some nice scenery near where I live, so I think I will add a bike to the list of things I'd like!”



Photography: Brian Chenier

Clockwise from top: Tony Salt, Roy Townsend and Michael Preater enjoy a stroll and a scone at the Batsford Arboretum and Garden Centre

A visit to Batsford Arboretum

Not all activities are for adrenaline junkies, and not far from the noise and excitement at Heythrop Park a group enjoyed a peaceful afternoon at Batsford Arboretum and Garden Centre.

With 56 acres of gardens that are home to trees and shrubs from all over the world the trip to the Arboretum attracted Members of all ages. Thirty-year-old Jack Cummings and 91-year-old Vera Levett enjoyed themselves in equal measure.

“The group is a real mix this year. We were joined by a number of Widows, including my mum, as well as Members with amputations and those with loss

of use,” says Brian Chenier, Blesma Support Officer (Prosthetics), who is facilitating the trip alongside Liz Watling and Susie Granger from the Blesma Welfare team. “We’ve even been joined by a couple of Members’ partners who have left their partner in safe hands back at the hotel!”

After much exploring, the group had worked up an appetite and stopped for afternoon tea. “The trip is great because it gets people together who wouldn’t necessarily stop and chat to each other on the street,” says Liz. “They all have Blesma in common, so that really breaks the ice!”

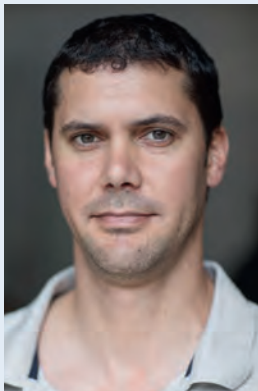


Get involved with activities!

All these, and many more activities, are on offer throughout the year – all for free! For more on what’s coming up in the next few months, and instructions on how to apply, turn to p14 of the main issue.

VOX POPS

What did you make of Members' Weekend?



“It’s great to meet up with people you haven’t seen for some years. I really enjoyed the social side of it, and my wife was made to feel extremely welcome, too. I enjoyed firing the crossbows, that was fun!”

CHARL PIENAAR



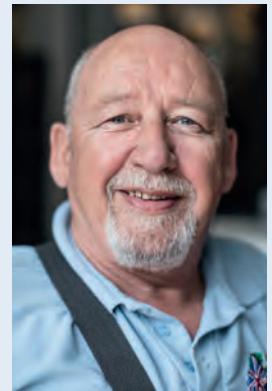
“I’ve really enjoyed the Weekend. The people are all lovely and very welcoming. It’s nice to see Charl with military people – he doesn’t get the chance too often. There was a lovely atmosphere for the formal meal, too.”

PHILIPPA PIENAAR



“The venue was lovely – just gorgeous – it made me want to take up golf! I’ve really enjoyed meeting up with friends we’ve met on previous Weekends and finding out how their lives have moved on – as well as getting to know people we’ve not met before.”

KARIE BRANCH



“I’m very happy to be here. It’s been great fun meeting old friends and new, and I decided to try some of the activities. I’m going to have a look at doing more photography, because the course and exhibition here were interesting.”

JOHN BEVAN



“The Weekend has put things into perspective for my family. My son Alex put his head on my shoulder and said: ‘You’re not the only one, dad’. There are other poor dads out there, and they are positive.”

KEVIN WORSLEY

“It’s great for Service personnel to get back into this environment. And it’s nice for me to be in an environment where it’s understood how hard it can be for partners. People just get it, and that’s been a very nice element for me.”

CERI WORSLEY



“It’s my first Members’ Weekend, and it’s been very impressive and sociable. It’s nice to be somewhere where you don’t have to explain yourself. I had a go at the cycling and shooting. This has already been a help in my early recovery.”

MARK BARTON



“The presentations were awesome, they were very thought-provoking. It’s been nice bringing my son along, he’s been made to feel welcome. We’ve made new friends.”

CHRIS GANLEY

Outreach Northern Ireland

Colin Shields

Thanks to funding that came Blesma's way as a result of the LIBOR bank fines, the Association was able to put nine new Outreach Officers in post in 2018. One of these new members of staff was entering relatively uncharted territory for the charity – Northern Ireland – and the results have already been significant.

Colin Shields, who lives in Northern Ireland, described his delight at being made aware of Blesma's work, and the Association has turned his life around. "I got back onto my feet quite quickly after my amputation, but I found that once



I got home, I was just sitting in a chair," he says. "I wouldn't go out. I felt that if I did, people would think there was nothing wrong with me.

"I got so low. I used to carry a personal protection weapon, because I'd had death threats and bombs

put under my car. It got to the stage where I had to sell the weapon because I was worried that I'd use it on myself."

But then Blesma came to the rescue. "Steve, my BSO, got in touch, and then along came our Outreach Officer, Fiona," he says. "We didn't know Blesma existed until Fiona appeared. She has built a family! It's only since Blesma got involved in my life that I've become the person I used to be rather than the person I was when I lost my leg. Fiona has taken us on days out, my family have been on a boat trip... It is the first time Members in Northern Ireland have got together and said: 'This is who we are'.

"Since then, I've been out fundraising, helping to explain to people what Blesma does. Fiona got me a new chair, we've given talks to school kids, and we've even formed a wheelchair basketball team. Being involved in Blesma has given me my confidence back. I have a saying: 'You can give up, give in, or give it all you've got.' I'm trying to give it all I've got!"

Wellbeing Retreat Fuerteventura

Kevin Worsley

Kevin Worsley, who has been a Member for 14 months, gave an emotional speech about how getting involved with Blesma activities has played a huge part in his recovery following amputation. "I've suffered a bit upstairs, but my BSO, Kevin Long, has been an inspiration," he says. "I was aware that Blesma took scooters to the Remembrance Parade in London. I wanted to do that, but first I needed to get out of my front door, and I found that difficult. With Blesma's help I did it, and it is the thing I'm most proud of in my life."

Kevin has since taken part in the PhotoVoice project



(see p11) and the Fitness and Wellbeing Retreat in Fuerteventura. "The week involves goal setting, mind coaching, breaking down barriers, group training and nutritional advice," says Kevin. "We had two wonderful trainers who didn't judge, but asked what you felt you needed and wanted. We discussed nutritional goals and did exercises that we filmed

on our phones so we'd know how to do them later on. You definitely get out of the week what you put in."

Whilst Kevin enjoyed the practical side of the course, the best bit was the attitude of those around him, he says. "Nobody worried about the fact that you had bits and pieces missing. They were just there to work as hard as they could. That tiny little thing – nobody staring at you – did it for me.

"The whole experience taught me that it's possible to achieve goals if you are focused, and that the only person stopping you is yourself. I used to say that to young lads when I was serving, but now I really understand it. I also learned that you need to be around positive people, and there's nothing like Service people for that camaraderie in achievement.

"I didn't think there would be much out there for me after my injury, but there is Blesma," Kevin concluded. "Seeing other guys getting better gives me the confidence and encouragement to know that it can be done."

Organising a Blesma Activity Day

Alex Krol

Former Royal Marine Alex Krol spoke to Members about the flying course he organised in Liverpool last year, and dispensed some valuable advice to anyone thinking about setting up an event of their own.

Alex, who is a keen pilot, took eight Members to John Lennon Airport in Liverpool, where they each experienced a 45-minute trial flight. “It was a great



day, and it came good for everyone involved,” Alex says. “Most of the Members decided not to carry on with flying afterwards, but they had a great time, and shared the experience with other Members afterwards.”

Alex says there are several key steps to suggesting a new activity to Blesma. “To start off, it is all about the pitch,” he says. “You need to know what you’re pitching, have a clear idea of the aims, and know what you’re asking for. Think about the pros and cons of your activity, and try to explain the positive things. We are a Member-led organisation, and Blesma wants to say yes to you.”

Secondly, if Blesma gives you the green light, Alex advises getting the



“BLESMA CAN BE THERE ON THE DAY TO HELP YOU RUN THE SHOW IF YOU WANT, SO STAY CALM, ENJOY IT, AND MAKE SURE YOU SPEND TIME WITH EVERYONE”

Association’s assistance in making sure it all goes to plan. “You can’t do it all by yourself, and Blesma is there to help. It was a daunting task to get everything boxed off, but the Association’s support was comprehensive – the Activities Team can be as active or as passive as you need them to be. I used them as a buffer between me and the participants

when it came to arranging all the logistics and details of the day itself.”

Alex says you then need to picture your own role on the day of the activity. “Don’t be the tea lady – delegate things like that. Blesma can be there on the day to help you run the show if you want, so stay calm, enjoy it, and try to spend some time with everyone.”

Finally, Alex advised anybody who stages a new event to show participants future pathways they can take after the activity. “Your main aim is to sell the activity because you’re passionate about it. I made sure everyone knew of ways they could take their flying further if they wanted to carry on – and I’ve stayed in touch with them all.”





Photo Booth

We grabbed you for a picture – now it's your turn to grab one back off us!

There were too many great photographs taken over Members' Weekend to show off here. So, if you had your picture taken with friends or family over the weekend and would like a digital copy to share with your loved ones, please send an email to editor@blesma.org and we'll be happy to send them over to you!

If we didn't get around to speaking to you at Members' Weekend you can still have your say. Let us know what you thought of the event by dropping us a line at editor@blesma.org



Outtakes

