

Blesma

Bulletin Members' Newsletter Summer 2019

Outreach is reaching out
Local activities p16

Recognition for their dedication
The Blesma Awards p26

Making Generation R



Prosthetics Provision



Delivering results

Find out how Blesma fared in 2018



Activities



Independent Living

Inside: Helping you to understand the benefits system



**Iceland is the perfect place for
photographers to hone their skills**

Find out more on p24

Blesma Bulletin

Summer 2019



Welcome to the Summer Bulletin. Having just seen the hottest day of the year so far I am reminded that the weather for Members' Weekend at the new Oxfordshire location could definitely have been better! Fortunately, we did have sun for the activities afternoon and the rain at other times certainly did not stop the Weekend being a strong success with hugely positive feedback.

The Annual General Meeting took place on the Sunday of the Weekend to an alert and engaged audience. The Chairman explained the position and performance of Blesma, made a statement upon Trustee tenure, and confirmed that the Outreach Officer programme will continue beyond the current pilot. There are articles giving more detail in this issue.

The office move to Chelmsford is going to plan but there are bound

to be some challenges before it is complete, and we are working hard to secure a tenant for the spare floor.

I am particularly pleased to have attended the 70th anniversary party of Sutton, Merton and District Branch. I witnessed support from far and wide, and over many generations. Members and families had travelled from across the UK and it was a moving event.

While not expecting Branches to re-form we are seeing the Outreach Officers bring more Members together locally and we hope to keep the momentum up. Do please ask your Outreach Officer for news of what is happening in your region. Their areas and contact details are at the back of this Bulletin. Please do try to make sure that there is at least one Blesma event in your Summer.

Barry Le Gry
Chief Executive



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Annual Report 2018: A summary

In accordance with the Blesma Strategic Plan, the charity's Lines of Operation, Priorities and Outputs are explained as follows:

Security

Our nine Area Support Officers and the body of volunteer Welfare Representatives provide Blesma's comprehensive "Welfare Service" and are the main source of information regarding how our Members fared during the year.

Their work is supplemented by a further Support Officer, Blesma's Support Officer (Prosthetics) who focuses on working closely with the NHS – at the working level with the Limb Service to resolve individual Members' prosthetic issues, and at the strategic level in contributing to policy development for provision of prosthetics and mobility aids to amputees and those suffering loss of use of limb.

The Support Officers work closely with Veterans UK to resolve War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme issues for individual Members, and with the Defence Recovery Capability, where they visit Members in the DMRC Stanford Hall and in Personnel Recovery Centres who are undergoing rehabilitation and/or transition to civilian life.

Director Independence and Wellbeing, working closely with the Chief Executive, decides how

grants to promote independence and wellbeing are distributed and to whom, following guidance from Trustees and long-standing practice. In 2018, Blesma made:

- **1,601 home visits and 761 other visits**
- **1,485 individual grants to 861 recipients**

We are extremely grateful for LIBOR funds which are paying for our Support Officer in Wales and West. They are also paying for a two-year Outreach pilot that began in 2018. Nine officers have been established alongside the Support Officers with the task of enabling local Member engagement and events, and mobilising volunteers, to counter isolation. The scheme will be evaluated fully in 2019. We are grateful to the Westminster Foundation for a grant funding activity in Lancashire.

In 2018, we continued to monitor prosthetic provision to Members across the UK. By working at an individual level, advocating for Members who require support locally at the NHS Limb Centres, as well as campaigning for changes nationally, improvements continue to be made. For those with Service attributable amputations, the Veterans' Prosthetics Panel (VPP) continues to provide an excellent process for funding of components in England. Eligible Members in

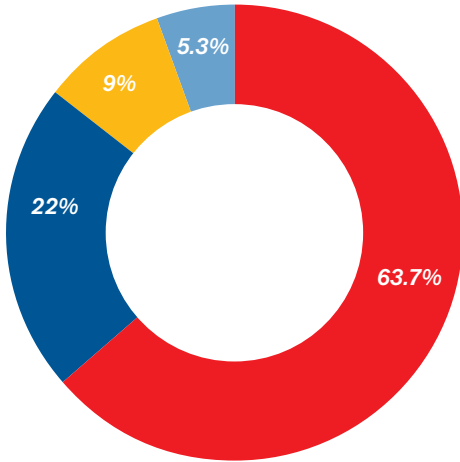
the devolved administrations have access to prosthetics via different mechanisms.

We met with representatives in the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Department to discuss ongoing and future provision of prosthetic care to attributable amputees, specifically with regards to maintaining a minimum like-for-like provision to those issued by DMRC Headley Court (now Stanford Hall) and those issued by the VPP. Verbal agreement was made in the absence of ministerial input. Blesma remains involved in the NHS England Prosthetic Service Review, which may be the greatest change to the way services are delivered in 30 years.

We continued to monitor the support to Members referred to the Complex Prosthetics Clinic at DMRC from the NHS for the management of complex prosthetic issues, and into the Veterans Trauma Network in England. This provides access to a regional network of 10 NHS Veteran Trauma Centres where NHS and military experts in trauma can provide targeted clinical plans to patients who have struggled in the standard system.

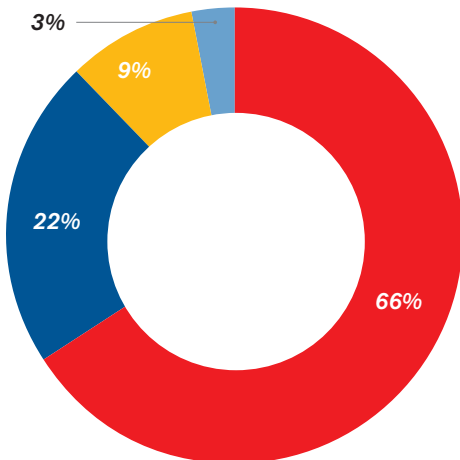
This is particularly the case for those with complex injuries suffered in blasts from IEDs which require multiple operations and expert care after they have left Service, many of whom reported

INCOME



Legacy	63.7%
Donations	22%
Investments	9%
Other	5.3%

STAFF, ATTRIBUTABLE AND GOVERNANCE COSTS (apportionment)



Membership Services	66%
Fundraising	22%
Awareness and Representation	9%
National Volunteer Office	3%

fragmented delivery and delays. This support can be life changing for those Members who are eligible for this treatment pathway.

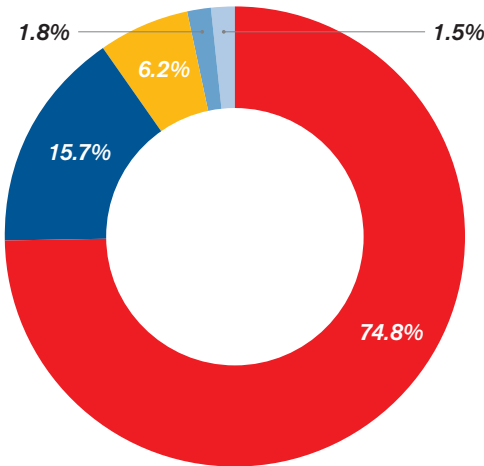
Our research project *Caring and Coping: The Family Perspective on Living with Limb Loss* was completed in 2018. Data was collected from a segment of the membership and the findings disseminated to a wide audience. Perhaps the most significant outcome is the development of the Living with Limb Loss Support Model which is being used by NHS Limb Centres and the DMRC Stanford Hall, as well as forming the centrepiece of a review of Blesma’s service delivery.

In addition to shifting focus towards providing more support to elderly and infirm Members in their own homes, we have also reinforced our support to Members’ carers and families as the result of the research findings. This support is rapidly developing into a bespoke service to meet individual Members’ needs, and in the last 12 months has included disability and mobility aids such as life-lines, stair lifts, bathroom adaptations, wheelchairs, ramps, and Electrically Powered Vehicles.

We have also supported those Members who have needed respite or residential care. The enduring pressure on Health and Social Care budgets continues to threaten service provision quantitatively and qualitatively. We keep a close watch on where gaps in support leave Members vulnerable and will continue to step in to meet their needs whilst always holding the State to account where appropriate.

We have also reinforced our delivery in this area by reviewing staff responsibilities, creating more

“8 pence of every pound of income generated in 2018 will be spent to raise funds for our Members in 2019”



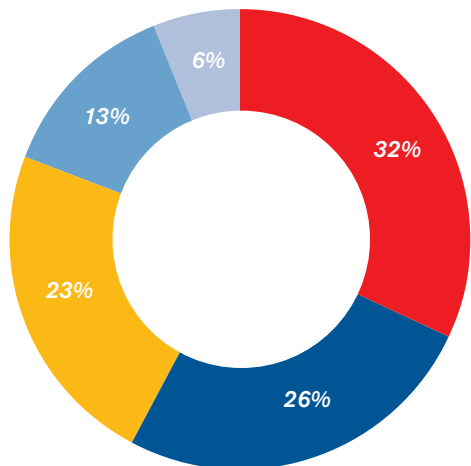
EXPENDITURE

Membership Services	74.8%
Fundraising	15.7%
Awareness and Representation	6.2%
Investment Management Fees	1.8%
National Volunteer Office	1.5%

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES EXPENDITURE

(Wellbeing, respect and realisation of potential)

Activities	32%
Advice and Support	26%
Grants and Assistance	23%
Overheads	13%
Engagement and Other	6%



capacity in a role focusing solely on benefits, allowances and social care, providing support with complex cases to individual Members, and advising the Executive and Support Officers on changes to legislation and the potential impact on Blesma Members. We are grateful to The Royal British Legion for a Support Officer capacity building grant.

Identity

Blesma's Activities Programme is a significant part of the offer to Members, forming a strong component of the Association's aim to promote confidence and self-belief; a vital rehabilitation element. Activities provide opportunities not only for physical and mental challenge but for social interaction with a camaraderie that is at the heart of any Blesma event. All types of Member are catered for, events are often challenging, many are ambitious, and all aim to be rewarding.

The activities on offer in 2018 had the usual mix; from the excitement of crewing a tall sailing ship to the Channel Islands, to less energetic pursuits such as art and photography courses, with a range of challenging and innovative activities in between, all of which were arranged within a supportive social framework.

Continuing the research-led theme of supporting those who care for the injured, the Activities Programme again included family-centred events such as a family activities week and couples' weekends. All events were subject to evaluation following feedback from participants giving valuable information for the improvement of the Activities Programme.

St Mary's University Research shows that "Members experienced a feeling of accomplishment, enhanced subjective wellbeing, and a sense of belonging following the event", with post-event follow-ups by staff a further distinguishing factor of the Programme.

In 2018, Blesma delivered 65 activities of 29 types with 445 participants (67 of whom were new to the Programme) taking part in 2,297 days of activities. Since its inception, Blesma has been an association defined by a fellowship of shared experience where Members have supported and mentored one another. Within activities, this Member interaction is tangible, and 36 of the 65 events were Member led.

Some highlights included:

- Chartering tall ship *Tenacious*; 39 Members sailed with The Jubilee Sailing Trust to the Channel Islands as working crew
- Blesma Members joining forces with the Graeae Theatre Company to put on a production of *This is Not For You*, commemorating 100 years since the end of WWI, to rave reviews. We are grateful to Arts Council England for their grant
- Horseback riding in Arizona
- Annual Winter Sports combined with a ski bike alpine event in which five adapted snow sports disciplines were included to allow Members maximum access to the slopes
- Multi-disciplinary water sports expedition to the Bahamas
- A Fitness and Lifestyle course that introduced 10 Members to improved nutrition and exercise regimes to help transform their lives

At the elite sporting level, 21 Members took part in the Invictus Games in Sydney, Australia, winning 35 of the UK's 72 medals, while five Members competed at World Championship level.

Looking forward to 2019, Blesma will continue to develop its Activities Programme, particularly at a local level with more Member-instigated events designed to increase appeal and uptake, whilst increased support from the Outreach Officers will also contribute in this regard.

Blesma aims for activities to be more than one-off events for the Members. Progression is important, and pathways will be available. Leaders will be encouraging Members to develop in their chosen activity in order to continue building confidence and self-belief; a social hub where Members interact and expand personal horizons.

Connectivity

Being connected is the foundation of the Association's proposition to its Members, it is why Blesma exists. Representing the needs and aspirations of our Members is fundamental to Blesma's work, and goes back to the dark days of neglect following WWI – with some 44,000 amputees struggling to live in "a land fit for heroes".

It was then that our tradition of advocacy was born and that work continues today whenever it is needed. Recent conflict has seen the need for modern advocacy leading to better compensation, better after care for the injured, and better prosthetic support for amputees. BSO (Prosthetics) represents Blesma on the steering group of NHS (England's)

Prosthetic Service Review, which is looking at the current service and asking if it is 'fit for purpose', with a view to ensuring that patients' needs are met going forward.

We are also involved in a collaborative project supporting Health Education England in delivering a series of half-day and full-day training sessions for GPs across England. The package not only provides an excellent learning opportunity for GPs about health needs for veterans, but it also introduces them to some of the many Service organisations that can help.

In a more complex realm, Blesma has represented the Confederation of Service Charities (Cobseo) assisting NHS England and the Ministry of Defence to develop a policy for the most injured requiring continuous health care; Integrated Personal Commissioning for Veterans. It is due to be released in early 2019.

Blesma conversed with the MoD on the formation of the Veterans' Strategy and will be involved in the consultation process that follows.

In the Autumn of 2018, the Blesma Community Programme, which has provided Blesma Members with the opportunity to train as motivational speakers and workshop facilitators, was rebranded as Making Generation R.

Members tell their stories of trauma and recovery to youth, and facilitate workshops on the themes of resilience and overcoming challenges, inspiring children and young people, especially those with additional needs or who are at risk of exclusion from school, in communities throughout the UK.

The programme has developed year on year, from 15 Blesma



Members trained to deliver their inspirational stories to 2,870 children and young people in 2015-16, to 40 Blesma Members trained and 23,000 young people reached in 220 sessions by the end of 2018.

In 2019, Making Generation R plans to expand further, not only to train more limbless veterans and reach 30,000 more young people, but also to help veterans who have already been trained on the programme to develop new workshop facilitating skills.

The programme will train 20 new participants to develop presentation skills and provide refresher training for 40 Blesma alumni to refresh their existing delivery skills as well as developing workshop facilitator techniques.

Amongst our wider target audience – more than 2.5 million members of the ex-Service community – the Blesma brand is increasingly recognisable and understood. On a national level, this awareness of what Blesma does and what it stands for continues to result in requests for our contribution on influential media outlets, relevant government committees and boards.

Blesma Magazine, with a readership of more than 33,700, and our continually evolving website with 162,000 annual visitors, remain central to both the communications and fundraising efforts.

Website traffic has increased by 27 per cent in the past 12 months, with the audience increasingly accessing www.blesma.org through tablet and smartphone versions of the site.

In line with national trends, social media has grown significantly in importance, both within the Association and amongst supporters. In 2018, Blesma Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts reached 490,000 readers a month, and the ability to tell Members' stories through appropriate channels continues to enhance Blesma's ability to help its people lead independent and fulfilling lives.

For a growing number of Members, social media is the medium of choice when it comes to communicating with the Association. Indeed, a number of Members in difficulty were picked up and supported as a result of Facebook and Twitter posts.

Resourcing

In 2018, 91 per cent of all income came through fundraising, the rest from investment income from previously raised funds. Blesma fundraising performed significantly well, holding its own against an increasingly difficult fundraising landscape for Armed Forces charities, many of whom saw a notable drop in income.

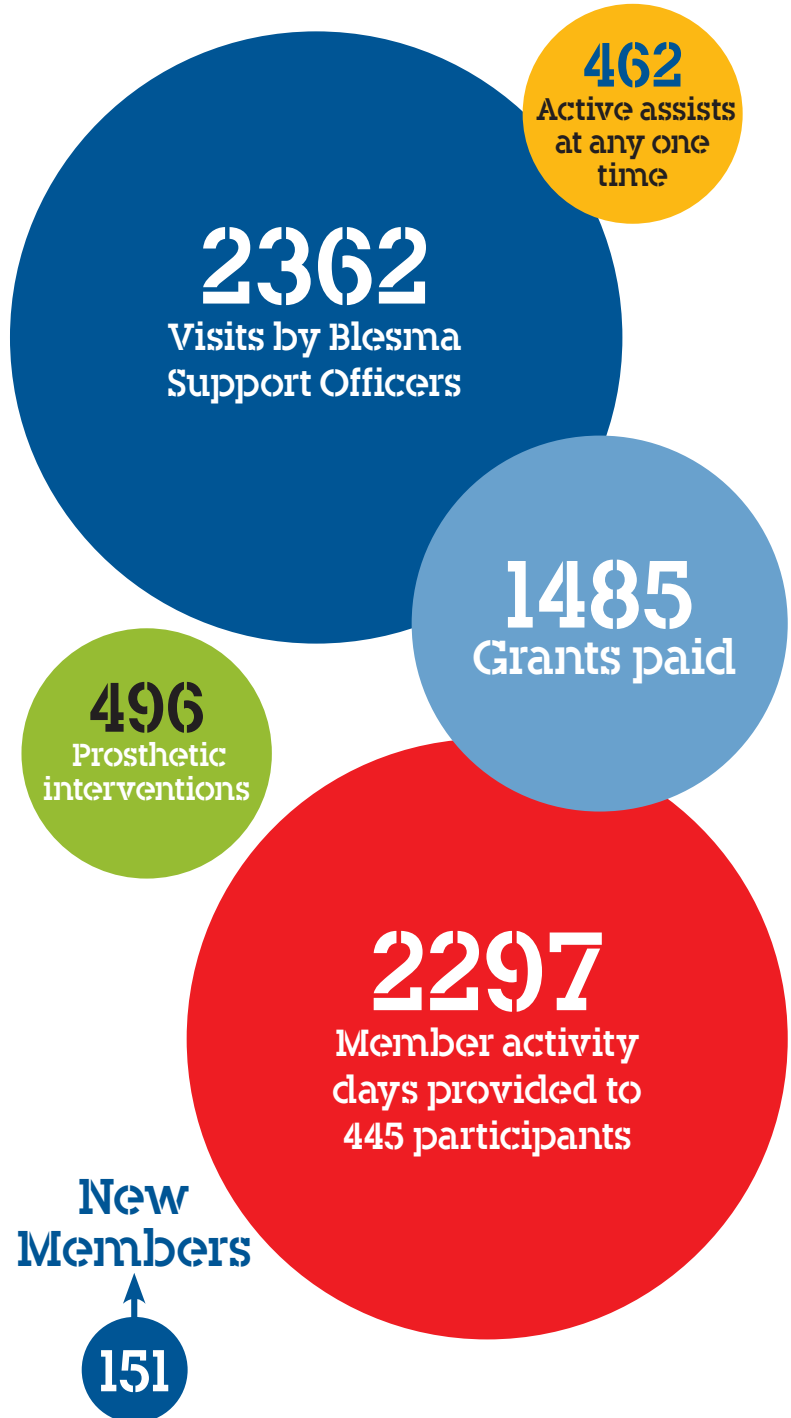
Fundraising remained efficient, with 8p in every pound of income in 2018 planned to raise funds in 2019. Blesma gathered 3,204 new supporters in the year, the majority through in-house led Direct Mail campaigns.

The introduction of General Data Protection Regulation in May 2018 caused little concern despite increased administrative overheads at inception as exemplary fundraising standards remained a constant in all our activity. Blesma paid its Levy to the Fundraising Regulator and continues to ensure the Regulator's guidelines on personal information and fundraising (consent, purpose and transparency) are adhered to.

Blesma does not employ agencies to raise funds from the public in the name of Blesma. A single commercial participant provided income of £3,000 per month, at no expense, on a contract reviewed annually.

Our fundraising activities are monitored closely. Our fundraising ethics and promise, complaints policy and privacy policy are published. Our safeguarding policy towards vulnerable people is adhered to in our fundraising activities. There were no formal complaints relating to fundraising in 2018.

Blesma 2018 in numbers



Blesma to Chelmsford move set for Autumn

The decision on the future of the Blesma office at Chadwell Heath has been finalised and the Board of Trustees has chosen to relocate the office to Chelmsford, Essex. Following advice from a number of surveyors and agents, the Board concluded that Frankland Moore House is no longer fit for purpose and it would be more cost effective in the long term, as well as being in the best interests of the Association, to purchase the more suitable and accessible building in Chelmsford (right).

In its current state, Frankland Moore House would need to undergo a major refurbishment as it is not fully accessible to Members or Trustees, nor is it fully utilised as a resource by Blesma, with one floor going unused. The House, which has been occupied by Blesma since 1965, also faces increasing health, safety and environmental risks as the building deteriorates and regulatory standards continue to rise.

Surveyors have estimated that a full refurbishment could cost in excess of £1.5 million and in the long term would not provide as good a return on investment as the purchase of the new premises. After taking all those points into consideration, the Board of Trustees decided to sell Frankland Moore House and find a new property that was more appropriate for both Members and staff.

“It was the right time to make a decision and the Trustees have the longer-term interests of the Association very much in mind,” said Blesma’s Chief Executive Barry Le Grys. “They have been really diligent in the planning and getting the best value for money for the Association.”



AN AUTUMN MOVE

The new Blesma office on New London Road in Chelmsford is expected to be ready in September. Preparations are underway to ensure there is no impact on the day-to-day business of the Association and its support to Members during the move. At the time of writing, all staff intend to make the move and recognise its advantages.

The contracts have now been exchanged and the Chadwell Heath office has been sold. The sums of both the selling of the office in Chadwell Heath and the purchase and refurbishment of the Chelmsford office will be finalised in next year’s accounts.



Future of Outreach Pilot secured

You'll have seen the article in the Spring edition of *Blesma Magazine* about the work of Blesma's Outreach Officers. The idea behind Blesma appointing nine Outreach Officers last year on a LIBOR grant-funded pilot was to get extra staff on the ground in each Area to concentrate on running activities at a local level and give Members who might feel isolated or lonely opportunities to connect with Blesma.

During the AGM at the recent Members' Weekend the Chairman announced that, as a result of the positive impact of the Outreach pilot over the last 12 months, the Trustees have made the decision that the programme will continue into the foreseeable future. This news was greeted by a round of applause from the Members attending the AGM who clearly agreed with the Board's decision. In addition to this announcement, the Board also acknowledged that an Outreach Officer for Scotland should be recruited to begin work in January 2020 as Members in Scotland currently don't have the same opportunities to get involved at the local level.

Over the next few months the team at Chadwell Heather will be implementing any lessons learned from the Outreach activities that have already taken place, and advertising for the role of the new Outreach Officer (Scotland). In the meantime, if you have the opportunity to attend a local activity please consider giving it a go. And if you have any questions about local events or how you can get involved, please contact your local Outreach Officer. All the relevant contact details can be found on p34.



2020 Soldiering On Award nominations

If you know someone who deserves to be recognised for their achievements or support for the Armed Forces community then Soldiering On is calling on you to nominate them for an award.

Next year will mark the 10th anniversary of the Soldiering On Awards, which were designed to highlight the inspirational achievements of current and former Service men and women and their families, as well as all those who support the Armed Forces community.

The Soldiering On Awards are seeking nominations across 12 categories ranging from Sporting Excellence to Family Values, and from Business of the Year to those who are championing Inclusivity with the Armed Forces.



The deadline for submitting your nominations is 30 September. For more information on the Awards, or for advice on how to make your nomination, visit www.soldieringon.org

Change in Blesma Trustee Tenure Policy

The Code of Good Governance, which was recently introduced and has been endorsed by the Charity Commission, advocates a healthy turnover of Trustees. The Blesma Board of Trustees recommends that this practice is adopted alongside Blesma's own rules on Trustee rotation and election.

In particular the length of service should be no more than nine years unless there are exceptional and well-argued circumstances. The nine years, if served, would involve three rotations of three years each, with the need to be re-elected at each rotation according to Blesma rules. Any questions on this subject should be raised with Chief Executive Barry Le Grys, who acts as Secretary to the Board of Trustees.

The Veterans Pain Management Programme

A pain management course is being offered exclusively to veterans. The Veterans Pain Management Programme, launched in 2016, is a free five-day residential programme run by The Centre For Veterans' Health at King Edward VII's Hospital. It is designed to help veterans who have been suffering with chronic pain to get the correct assessment, diagnosis and treatment.

Blesma Member Gary Castle attended the course in March having suffered from Phantom Limb Pain since 2013. "I've been in and out of hospital for the last five years because of pain problems with my artificial limb, which has resulted in my residual limb being amputated shorter," said Gary. "I also suffer from pain in my left leg because it bares most of my body weight, so during the course we looked into pain management for both legs."

The course ran from Monday to Friday, during which Gary joined nine other veterans to receive both group and individual sessions from consultants in pain medicine, psychology and psychiatry, as well as a specialist pain nurse and pain physiotherapist.

"We began each morning with stretching and breathing exercises to relax us for the day. During the programme we had sessions with a pharmacist who taught us about the drugs we were taking, how



they work and why we are given them. A psychologist was also on hand to explain how the brain reacts to pain." After the five-day programme has finished, veterans attend five follow-up sessions over the course of six months.

"I would recommend the course to anyone who has been suffering long-term pain," said Gary. "They don't have to have suffered a combat injury either. I came away from the course knowing that I had learnt a lot. I still experience pain but now I know how I can cope with it better using things like breathing exercises. The course also recommended that I do some exercise rather than sitting around and worrying when the next pain might come. Since then I have found swimming is really helping."

For more on the course, or to get a grant application form, contact the hospital on 020 7467 4348 or email veteranshealth@kingedwardvii.co.uk

A-Plan custom insurance for Blesma Members

Travelling with health conditions or disabilities can be very expensive. Insurance can be unaffordable, sometimes making trips abroad extremely difficult for Members.

Blesma has partnered with A-Plan Farnham, a company that helps people enjoy holidays and overseas trips by finding the right insurance policy to fit every individual requirement.

A-Plan Farnham can help with pre-existing medical conditions and extreme sports cover. The policies are sourced by a select panel of high-quality insurers and expert helpful advisers, helping you save time and money.

The company has reduced its usual fees, with the savings passed on to Blesma Members.

Why A-Plan?

- Policies tailored to individual needs
- Rated 'Excellent' on TrustPilot
- Friendly, helpful, qualified advisers
- Assistance with claims
- Saving you time, money and hassle

To get a quote for travel insurance call 01252 728 316, stating that you are a Blesma Member.

A-Plan Insurance is a trading name of A-Plan Holdings who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Registered office: Des Roches Square, Witney, OX28 4LE. Registration number: 750484

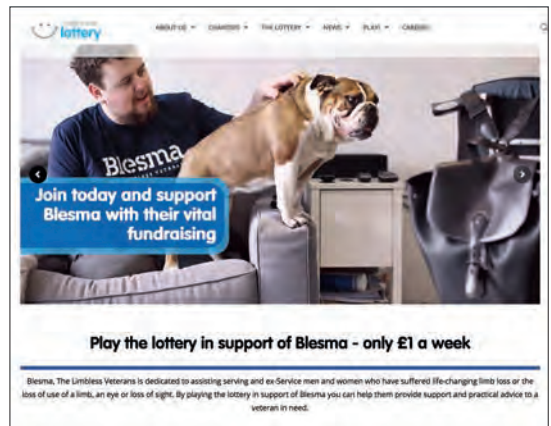
Blesma is proud to partner with make a smile lottery

Words: *Hayden Bennett*

Blesma is proud to be partnering with make a smile lottery to provide a fun and easy way to raise funds and support. The lottery is owned by St Helena, a hospice charity based in Colchester, Essex. St Helena began its own lottery a number of years ago and now manages the make a smile lottery for itself as well as for many other hospices across the UK. In 2017, it expanded the make a smile lottery to non-hospices and was awarded the Institute of Fundraising's award for Most Innovative Product.

The goal of this new partnership is to raise £500,000 over the next five years for Blesma's vital work supporting injured veterans. Blesma is the first national charity to sign up to make a smile lottery and the Association is very excited about the potential to raise significant funds through the lottery. Blesma has entered into a five-year agreement which will see lottery canvassers signing people up to a Direct Debit and the opportunity to win up to £10,000.

The make a smile lottery draw costs just £1 a week to play, with guaranteed cash prizes (15 prizes of £10 and a first prize of £250) up for grabs every week. There is also a rollover draw of up to £10,000 with



the biggest prize given out so far being £4,400. Once running costs and prize funds are covered, the rest of every £1 goes directly to Blesma.

The make a smile lottery is licensed by The Gambling Commission, and players must be aged 16 or over to take part. Please play responsibly.

You can learn more at www.makeasmilelottery.org.uk/supported-charities/we-support-blesma

Fundraising appoints new Regional Fundraising Manager

Following a review of the Association's fundraising activity, Blesma decided to appoint a Regional Fundraising Manager to work primarily in the Midlands, North East and North West.

The decision was a conscious effort to widen the Association's fundraising reach, and to work

with the Outreach Officers to engage with supporters in those areas. The three areas were chosen due to their historic affinity with the military, in recognition of the level of support Blesma has from those areas, and because of the economic growth being seen there.

In July, Lucy Dalgness became

the Association's Regional Fundraising Manager. Lucy is an experienced regional fundraiser who previously worked for Parkinson's UK. She visited Chadwell Heath on 09 July for her induction and will work from home in Nottingham but will be 'on the road' most of the time.

News from across the Branches

BOURNEMOUTH BRANCH

We hold our meetings at the War Memorial Homes in Bournemouth, and it was recently proposed that we sponsor a tree to be planted in memory of all residents past and present who have resided there.

We did some research and discovered with some certainty that our Branch was founded there around 1948. Archie Miles was one of the founders along with many others whom I had the privilege to call friends; Jack Sweetzer, Frank Small, Eddie Saunders, Molly Saunders, and Megan Macdowell to name but a few. All have passed on now but we still have residents who live there. On Friday 12 June we gathered on the green outside the Homes and dedicated our tree along with 19 others.

To raise the money to pay for the tree I acquired a signed AFC Bournemouth football strip which was raffled at our Solent Summer Lunch in Bournemouth on 25 July.

Meanwhile, on Sunday 23 June, we held our annual pilgrimage to Weymouth for the annual Veterans Weekend, where we paraded the Standard along with many others. The following weekend, we helped BSO South Pat Donnachie and Outreach Officer Andy Barlow at the National Armed Forces Day event in Salisbury. A busy time for all!

Peter Sherston-Baker



SUTTON, MERTON AND DISTRICT BRANCH

The Sutton, Merton and District Branch celebrated its 70th anniversary at the Army Reserve Centre of 210 (Sutton) Transport Squadron Royal Logistic Corps on 29 May.

Branch officials were joined by Members old and new, staff including Blesma Chief Executive Barry Le Grys, as well as the family of late Blesma Members.

The Branch was thrilled to be joined by special guest WWII veteran Sam Gallop CBE, who is an inaugural member of the Branch, a Sir Archibald McIndoe Guinea Pig, and a long-standing campaigner for the disabled of limb.

“The motto of our generous Royal Logistic Corps hosts at our 70th anniversary celebration is ‘we sustain.’ This is very appropriate to our celebration as the Sutton, Merton and District Branch of Blesma sustained me some 70 years ago when I was a fairly new double amputee with other wounds,” said Sam, who was joined by his wife Renee. “The other Branch Members and our caring Welfare Reps have been, and continue to be, an inspiration to me and to so many other individuals with limb loss and their loved ones. I look forward to many more celebrations!”

The celebrations included fantastic bagpipe music from volunteer and serving regimental piper Steve McGuinness that greeted guests as they arrived. There was also a display of Blesma’s history, speeches from Sam and Barry, and two Blesma decorated cakes. David Hobson was also awarded a 10-year Meritorious Service Award for

his dedicated service to the Branch. It is hoped the celebrations will inspire and encourage Branch Members to build on the success of the past 70 years since the birth of the Branch in 1949.

“The celebration surpassed my own expectations for the evening, which in probability reflects the hard work that was put in to make it a reality, so renewed thanks to all involved,” said Steve McNeice, Chairman of Sutton, Merton and District Branch. “I know from speaking to many guests that they were delighted and thoroughly enjoyed the evening. I have already received several thank you notes.”

Come and join in – all Blesma Members are welcome

We would like to remind ALL Blesma Members that whilst our Branch name is Sutton, Merton and District Branch we have many Members from further afield as our Branch is open to ALL Blesma Members. So, we encourage and openly invite any Blesma Member

to pop along and join in any of our meetings, which are usually held over a pie and a pint. So please don’t be shy as we would really like to meet and welcome you to our friendly and very sociable Branch.

Access is NOT a problem

It is also important to reiterate the fact that access or transport should not become a barrier to attending, and would ask that if you wish to attend a meeting and/or an activity that you contact either your BSO, Outreach Officer, or our Branch, and we will work collaboratively to help as and where needed.

Should you have any questions, or are considering popping along to one of our get-togethers, please don’t hesitate to contact Steve on either 07917 177336 or by email at steve@geniums.co.uk so that we can answer any of your questions and to ensure that we look out for you.



The best of British at veterans' cookery day

MIDLANDS

A group of 12 Blesma Members and carers joined together for a day of fun and food at Seasoned Cookery School in the Midlands.

The group was made up of keen cooks (including one ex-chef!) as well as culinary novices who readily admitted that their cooking repertoire began and ended with tea and toast.

Throughout the day, the Blesma Members and their carers learned

to cook a variety of dishes, from easy mid-week meals to slow cooked pigs' cheeks. They even learned how to butcher a chicken!

Food is an important part of daily life, mental wellbeing, spending time with friends, and self-sufficiency. Being able to cook and share a meal with friends can be a great source of achievement and something that is quite different to the physical exertion required for sporting events.

“This is amazing – cooking and producing a dish from scratch that I’m really proud of,” said Phillip Coombes of the day.

The day included preparing:

- The perfect steak with a Béarnaise sauce
- A chicken and serving it with a wild garlic mousse
- Slow cooked pigs' cheeks
- Lamb neck fillet with hoisin sauce and quinoa



– Scotch eggs with haggis and black pudding to be enjoyed at home

“Our community days are the ones we cherish the most, as we see people who don’t normally cook grow in confidence in the kitchen and produce some delicious food that previously they wouldn’t have thought possible,” said Clare and Tania from Seasoned Cookery School.

“We were inspired by the positive attitude of the Blesma veterans who took part and it was great seeing husbands and wives cook together.”

For more information on courses offered by the cookery school visit www.seasonedcourses.com



Trauma teddies and baby hats

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Winter months can be long, dark, cold and potentially isolating so what better way to fill those months than to get creative for the benefit of others?

The goal had to be something that would not only be therapeutic and provide a sense of purpose to Members, but would be something we could do together, albeit in our own homes and in our own time. Knitting and crocheting seemed to be the perfect fit.

Everything from the patterns to the hooks, the needles to the wool was provided and delivered to those ladies taking part.

Over a three month period, 35 trauma teddies were crafted and given to the local police station in Craigavon. The police officers will now be able to give these to young children or vulnerable young adults to provide comfort in what would be seen as a difficult or upsetting situation for them.

In addition, some 273 hats were also made for premature babies who need all the warmth they can get in their first weeks. These were delivered to the neo-natal units at the Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast, Antrim Area Hospital, Craigavon Area Hospital and Altnagelvin Area Hospital Londonderry.

The team from Northern Ireland who made the teddies and hats celebrated completing this activity by getting together for lunch to showcase the items they had made and chat about this shared interest, getting to know each other a little more as a result.

“I was in awe of the talent that was on display by the group and would like to say a big Outreach thank you to all who took part,” said Fiona Morrison, Outreach Officer for Northern Ireland.

“I would like everyone who has been involved to know that they have made a difference to the life of a child!”

“I was in awe of the talent on display. I would like everyone who has been involved to know that they have made a difference to the life of a child!”

Horses for people

NORTHERN IRELAND

In April, Members in Northern Ireland had the opportunity to experience a day with horses in the most tranquil environment, learning how these magnificent creatures can help people tackle stress and maintain a balanced perspective on life.

Hosted by Horses for People, the key objective for the Members was to learn from the horses and, in turn, learn about themselves. Horses do not care what job title you have, they react to the current situation and the energy, intention and body language you present, so the importance of connecting and building a rapport with the horses was paramount.

The good old Northern Irish weather didn't let the group down, but the Members certainly didn't let the cold winds and rain dampen their spirits.

Throughout the day, the rapport between the Blesma Members – Liam Brown, Colin Shields, William Curran, Philip McVeigh, and Michael O'Brien – and their horses developed through a number of techniques.

– **To start, the Members relaxed** with a cuppa and set out their intentions for the day; one personal and one for the group.

– **Building trust;** a blindfolded exercise to become aware of



all other senses and place trust in one another.

– **Building rapport;** introducing themselves to the horses and noticing the different responses from their body language and interactions.

– **Breathing;** synchronising their breathing with the horse to learn how breathing can calm the mind and emotions. To reflect on how difficult it can be to switch off when stressed, whereby a horse will react appropriately and simply go back to grazing.

– **Inner stance;** an indoor exercise, not involving the horses, which explored how we approach life;

what we say and don't say, and to become more aware of our non-verbal communication.

– **Leading and developing trust;** reading the signals from the horse and learning to be confident with their own body language.

– **Grooming/connecting;** observing boundaries and personal space to take forward into their own lives. Gaining trust and respect, and to believe and trust their own instincts and intuition.

– **Watching, assessing, trust and respect;** the final exercise of the day and definitely the most inspiring. Being in the moment; no lead rein, just you and the horse in sync. With the connection made it is your respect, energy, body language and signals that ultimately motivate the horse - what a feeling! For one Member this produced an overwhelming feeling of emotion which he described as a hugely positive experience.

Comments from some of our Members included; “June Burgess is an inspiration”, “Just amazing!”, “I would love to do that again”, “A day I will never forget”, “The group were not what I thought; they treated me like normal.” Horses for People is run by June

Burgess, who was a Soldiering On Awards 2019 finalist. June said: “Every one of these guys gave everything, not least because they followed the example of Fiona, their Outreach Officer,” said June. “Each one was perfect for doing the course and I think they’ll reflect on it and benefit more as they move forward. I can see that not only is there a huge amount of respect for Fiona, but she is motivating and inspiring them. The whole thing was a pleasure. Thank you to them all for being brave enough to do it!”

For more on Horses for People visit www.horsesforpeople.co.uk



Celebrating St David's Day and meeting Tracy Schmitt



MEMBERS CELEBRATE SAINT DAVID'S DAY

A belated St David's Day dinner was held at the St Mellons Hotel and Spa in Cardiff on 27 March. Members and Widows from Cardiff, Swansea, Barry, Aberdare, Tondy, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Newport and Monmouth came together to celebrate over cawl, lamb and bara brith.

Organised and hosted by Jason Suller, Outreach Officer for the West, the dinner was a great success. It saw the 91st birthday celebrations of Blesma Widow Molly Roberts and allowed Swansea and Cardiff Branch Members to reconnect – some for the first time in years.

Molly and Freda Bennett, from



Barry, were overcome with emotion after seeing each other for the first time in years, while the occasion also allowed younger Members to meet and get to know older Members and Widows.

“There was a remarkable mix of ages,” said Tom Hall, Blesma Support Officer West. “Members were able to swap stories about their exploits in the Services, and

share advice about prosthetics and rehabilitation after injury.

“The event included veterans from Iraq, Afghanistan, Northern Ireland, Bosnia and the Falklands War. The dinner was truly an example of Blesma Members connecting to each other and making new friends.”

After spotting a carving of a Guardsman in the gardens of the hotel, Roy Townsend decided that a photograph with his BSO, Tom, was in order. Tom being an ex-Coldstream Guardsman himself thought this was a lovely moment to celebrate a bit of history. It was Diane, Roy's partner, however, who guessed that the wooden carving was of a Welsh Guardsman!

The dinner not only offered



the chance for Members to swap stories but it was also an occasion for Tom to catch up on Members' welfare issues and meet Members who are new to Blesma.

These groups and occasions highlight the importance of the Blesma Outreach programme. The event brought Members and Widows together, drew those Members who are more isolated out to reconnect within a social situation, and also allowed for concerns to be discussed in a relaxed atmosphere.

THE CHANCE TO MEET AN INSPIRATIONAL WOMAN

Meanwhile, Members in Wales were delighted to get the chance to meet Canadian Paralympian,



renowned motivational speaker, and quadruple amputee Tracy Schmitt in April.

During the visit at the Liberty Football Stadium in Swansea, Tracy spoke to Blesma Members


Steve Fisher, Terri Hunt, Mike Westwood, Bruce Falkenberg and Annie Davine about resilience, motivation in others, and the link they all share with fellow amputees from overseas.

Tracy commented that the Blesma Members in attendance were an inspiration to her and noted how resilient they were.

“Tracy is an absolute star and so inspirational. She’s like a Duracell bunny and has certainly shown me what I can do as a double amputee,” said Bruce during an interview with ITV Wales on the day. “If she can do it, so can I!”

Remembering my friend Winston Bilcock

HMS Plymouth: 1st Commission 1961 to 1963 by Peter Sherston-Baker

 On 19 March 2018 my mate Bilco 'crossed the bar.' His health deteriorated after he qualified to become a Blesma Member. I first met Bilco in 1961. We were all standing in Devonport Barracks by our new ship, HMS Plymouth. She was a brand-new Type 12 ASW Frigate; F126. She was built right there in the dockyard and named after her city. We were very proud of her.

On 12 May (the day after commissioning) we were given the Freedom of the City and marched down Royal Parade to have lunch with the Lord Mayor in the Guildhall. We then departed for Portland where we did six weeks of intensive training. This included RAS (replenishment at sea) both fuel and dry stores, towing, live firing and (mainly) anti-submarine exercises. These entailed long hours of boredom punctuated by periods of frantic activity.

Bilco was on weapons. He loaded the A/S Mortar Mk 10 (the 'Limbo' as it was known), MCS three positions load, train and stow, pushed a button and hydraulics did the rest. Meanwhile Control, the brains of the outfit, did all the hard work of finding, tracking and firing the mortars. There were no helicopters in those days, "seek and destroy" was our motto... and our ship was very good at it.

Our Mess was number 15, starboard side, aft, under the quarterdeck and right on top of the screws. There was no air-con and most of us slept in hammocks. We were all TAS (torpedo and anti-submarine) and all good mates; you had to be in those conditions. We ate, lived and slept in a space not much bigger than the average front room and the favourite time for "officer of the watch" manoeuvres were lunch time. Therefore, we usually had to eat at a 45-degree angle.

We sailed for the Far East (via Gibraltar) to Malta and on to Suez. After we left Malta, we encountered one of the worst storms ever. Several ships were lost, one being the SS Clan Keith. We had to return to Malta for repairs as all sorts of bits were missing, but thankfully no crew. We resumed our voyage,

transiting the Suez and anchoring in the Bitter Lakes on Remembrance Sunday. We paraded in our 'sixes' (white suits) and I remember it being very hot. On completion, 'Hands to Bathe' was piped and we all went over the side for a swim.

On to Aden, we met up with HMS Victorious and chased her back to Suez as plane guard. There we picked up HMS Centaur and brought her back to Mombasa for Christmas. We enjoyed Christmas Day in Mombasa but on Boxing Day we were recalled from shore and set off again with Centaur towards "destination unknown." It turned out to be Aden. There had been trouble in the Persian Gulf so we spent New Year's Eve in the NAAFI Club on the beach.

Afterwards, we sailed for Singapore, arriving in January. We did all the usual exercises: jet 62 with 40 ships of all nations and plane guard for the next six months. We visited Malaya, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), The Philippines, Hong Kong, Japan and Burma. By August we were back in Suez waiting to be relieved by HMS Rothsay. Afterwards, we went back through the canal, passed Malta and Gibraltar, and made it back to Plymouth on 05 September. Over the previous 11 months we had steamed 63,912 miles, carried out 123 replenishments at sea, and achieved an average speed of 15.5 knots.

And what was Bilco doing this whole time? Writing letters. Lots and lots of letters! He was engaged to June before we left and was saving up so that they could marry, which they finally did in October 1962, in the Church of the Holy Cross, the Parish Church of Crediton where we also said our farewells in March 2018, some 56 years later.

Mess number 15 turned out in full (as we have done every year for many years) for our own Mess reunion and this year we are going to join with all other Association members in October in Kegworth, which will include a trip to the National Memorial Arboretum, where you will find Bilco on Plymouth bench. Sit down and have a chat.

Mallorca Cycle Training 2019

The road cycling training week in Mallorca not only gave us the chance to spend time on a bike and test ourselves with long hill climbs, but it also gave us the chance to learn how to look after our bodies, and how to prepare and fuel it before training or racing.

The activity was well planned from start to finish. The Members were split into two groups, both with very experienced lead riders, so the Members could work at a level that suited them. The advanced cyclists had a great workout, and although the second group didn't cover as many miles or work at quite the same altitude, it was still a very demanding week. If a novice like myself can complete such a week then so can you – and there was always a car close by in case the instructors felt it was needed.

The mornings started off with pilates, as well as advice and exercises for anyone with other issues. I was even given some tips and tricks to improve my walking.

After breakfast, the real fun started and we went out riding. Most of the rides finished by mid-afternoon to allow us to take in the beauty of Pollensa and its surroundings. Those who wanted to chill after the ride had access to a swimming pool and a huge hot tub at our luxury resort.

Prior to our meal each evening, we were given talks on nutrition



and the use and contents of various energy bars and gels. That is where I realised I had been going wrong!

Throughout the week there were plenty of opportunities to learn about bike maintenance – not least because a few of us experienced minor issues. All in all, the week

was a great learning opportunity, and on behalf of all the riders who took part, I would like to convey our thanks to the Blesma Activities Team, and to the instructors Stuart and Lizzie for what was a truly outstanding week.

John Williams

ACTIVITIES



Iceland Photography Expedition 2019

Words: *Sue Wright*

Building on the Beginners' and Intermediate photography courses, nine Members and a carer headed off on Blesma's third expedition to Iceland in May to try out different aspects of advanced photography along the challenging southern coast.

There were many opportunities to photograph waterfalls, glaciers, rapids, exploding geysers, awesome volcanic landscapes, and the beautiful steaming blue volcanic waters.

Members felt this photography activity was very stimulating and helped to develop their photography skills further.

"What a fantastic experience. This expedition has allowed me to try out and put into practice what I have learned on previous photography courses to great effect," said double above-knee amputee Steve McNeice. "Not only was I able to select appropriate lenses for different environments, but I was also able to select different camera settings with some competence. I spent much of the time exploring the relationship between depth of field, shutter speed, and light and dark. It was a great expedition, with a lot of good banter, and I have acquired several transferable skills and knowledge that will help me in other aspects of my life."

Andrew Haugen also enjoyed the trip. "As a wheelchair user I find it hard to get out and about to take photographs, but this was well organised. My main lesson was on the use of long shutter speeds and filters. Being with other photographers meant I could watch and learn from them – and I was all too happy to share my tips with others!"



And the Blesma Awards 2018 go to...

Words: *Hayden Bennett*

A number of Blesma Members left the annual gala dinner at Member's Weekend as worthy winners of the Blesma Awards 2018. The awards serve as a thanks for their relentless hard work, dedication and support

THE EARL OF ANCASTER MEMORIAL AWARD

Brendan and Ann Snoddy

The Earl Of Ancaster Memorial Award for 2018 was awarded to Brendan and Ann Snoddy. The award recognises their tireless work and support behind closed doors within the Bournemouth Branch.

The citation reads: "This Award was established in memory of Blesma Member Major The Earl of Ancaster KCVO TD, who served in the Leicestershire Yeomanry in World War II and lost a leg in Normandy in 1944. It recognises the work undertaken by a Blesma Volunteer, who has made a positive contribution to a Blesma Branch. The recipients of this Award are long-standing supporters of the Bournemouth Branch and this year, the Earl of Ancaster Memorial Award is presented to Brendan and Ann Snoddy.

"Brendan has served for many years as the Bournemouth Branch Honorary Secretary, a role which he finds challenging but continues to fulfil, while Ann has provided valuable support by preparing for Branch meetings, and planning and delivering the highly popular bi-annual functions. Brendan and Ann are tireless in their devotion to the Members, performing valuable behind-the-scenes support within the Branch. They also play a vital role garnering support for the Weymouth Armed Forces Day and in attracting new Members to the Branch. Brendan's involvement with the Royal Engineers Association in Dorset has brought many benefits to the Branch and Blesma via supporters and fundraising. It is only fitting that we recognise Brendan and Ann's dedicated service to Members, and they are most worthy recipients of the Earl of Ancaster Memorial Award."

THE CYRIL STEPHENS AWARD

Rob Holland and Cathy Thompson

The Cyril Stephens Award for 2018 was awarded to Rob Holland and Cathy Thompson. The award recognises their fantastic fundraising efforts for Blesma – the pair have raised more than £12,000. The duo were presented with their award at the top of the O2 – while fundraising for Blesma!

The citation reads: "This Award is in memory of Blesma Member Cyril Stephens OBE, one of the founder Members of the Association, who was Honorary Auditor for Blesma from 1932-1947, and National President from 1949 until his death in 1956.

"It recognises the work undertaken by Blesma supporters, and this year is awarded to Rob Holland and Cathy Thompson. Rob and Cathy have supported Blesma for more than five years, taking on different challenges such as running the epic London Marathon to holding dinner parties, raffles, and an auction in their hometown of Lincoln. Last year, the pair took part in the D-Day 44 Challenge and raised an impressive £1,267 for Blesma, as well as manning stalls at Armed Forces Day and Remembrance Day, selling poppy scarves and spreading the message of Blesma. Since they began fundraising for Blesma, the pair have raised an incredible £12,000 for the Association and Members.

"It is only fitting that we recognise Rob and Cathy's dedicated service to our charity by the award of The Cyril Stephens Award."

THE HAMBRO AWARD

Owen Pick

The Hambro Award for 2018 is awarded to Owen Pick. It recognises his overwhelming talent and dedication to snowboarding which resulted in him being picked for the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Paralympic Games and bearing the flag for Team GB in the opening ceremony.

The citation reads: “This Award recognises high achievers in any field having displayed exceptional commitment and dedication. It was established in memory of Member Major J O Hambro MC, a former Chairman and Treasurer of Blesma who served with the Coldstream Guards and lost a leg in Normandy in 1944. This year, it is awarded to Owen Pick.

“In 2010, Owen was serving with the 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment in Afghanistan when a blast from an IED resulted in the loss of his right leg. During his recovery, Owen participated in a Blesma rehabilitation activity trip where he discovered his love and talent for snowboarding. Within 18 months he was hurtling up the World rankings, beating experienced able-bodied competitors along the way.

“Owen’s dedication, hard work and daredevil spirit towards snowboarding over the next six years resulted in his selection for the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Paralympic Games, and he was awarded the honour of being the GB flag bearer for the Games’ opening ceremony.

“We acknowledge Owen’s exceptional commitment and dedication to his sport by the presentation of the Hambro Award.”

THE FRANKLAND MOORE TROPHY

Bill Arscott

The Frankland Moore Trophy for 2018 was awarded to Bill Arscott. It recognises his wonderful work as a Welfare Rep for West Devon, and acts as a thank you for his excellent organisational skills, and his exceptionally positive and proactive nature.

The citation reads: “This Award is in memory of Dr Charles Frankland Moore OBE and his wife Dr Elizabeth Frankland Moore OBE who were held in very high esteem by Blesma Members as a result of their vital work after World War II in securing Blesma’s strong financial position.

“This trophy recognises the work undertaken by Blesma’s Welfare Volunteers, known as Welfare Reps. This year it is awarded to Bill Arscott, Welfare Rep for West Devon. Bill became a Blesma Member in 2015 and, following the immediate support he received from the Association, he became more actively involved with Blesma, and in 2016 he took on welfare duties in Plymouth. Bill has built a great rapport with the Plymouth Members, and his organisational skills and ability to take action in support of Members wherever possible have had a significant impact on Members in his flock.

“Bill provides a valuable service to his local Blesma Support Officer and is an excellent example of ‘Member helping Member.’ He is truly deserving of the Frankland Moore Trophy.”

THE JACK TRIGG MEMORIAL AWARD

Matt Weston

The Jack Trigg Memorial Award for 2018 has been awarded to Matt Weston. The award recognises personal endeavours or sporting agility. Matt is yet to receive his award, so keep an eye out for his story in the next issue of the Bulletin!

Congratulations to all the winners – they are just a few exceptional examples of the great things that our Members, volunteers and supporters are doing within Blesma. Please keep it up throughout 2019!

Meredith McCracken, Harpist

During the gala dinner at Members’ Weekend, those who attended were privileged to hear the musical talents of Meredith McCracken.

Meredith is a professional harpist with more than 30 years’ experience of working with the UK’s major orchestras. Guests were able to sit back and enjoy Meredith’s wide ranging repertoire of well-known classics and unique arrangements.

To learn more about Meredith, and to listen to some of her music, visit www.absoluteharp.com

Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care

Welcome to the Bulletin's regular section on the benefits system. As well as highlighting some useful information on benefits, we will also be raising awareness of some independence and wellbeing information. If you would like to discuss your benefit entitlement, please contact your Blesma Support Officer. Alternatively, you can get in touch with *Liz Watling in the Independence and Wellbeing Team* by email at iwabenefits@blesma.org or on **020 8548 3516**.

DISABILITY ASSESSMENTS FOR BENEFIT

Successful appeals to disability benefits are currently running at around 70 per cent. The appeal process can be stressful and time consuming, with many taking around a year to resolve. Although a successful appeal will result in backdated benefits to the initial date of claim, it means that people are having to manage on their current finances and may not be able to meet the level of support they need due to their illness or disability.

Claimants have to show they meet a number of criteria including an assessment to show the level of their disability. This is based on the functional impact of their condition, rather than the condition alone. Therefore, Blesma has Members who have the same disability (eg. single amputee) who may be able to manage at different levels and may receive a different benefit decision.

The Department for Work and Pensions, who manage benefit claims, have contracted out the disability benefit assessment process to partner providers. MAXIMUS completes assessments for those who are claiming because they feel unable to work due to their illness or disability. These are for Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit. Independent Assessment Services (part of ATOS) and Capita complete the Personal Independence Payment assessment, which is to consider the impact of a condition on someone's

ability to manage their daily living skills (e.g. personal care and communication) and mobility.

To reduce the possibility of having to go through the appeal process, Blesma has developed awareness training sessions for the providers to educate their assessors on living with limb loss so that they will have a better understanding of the challenges faced by amputees. The sessions cover aspects such as how and why amputations occur, a brief history of prosthetic devices, and complications and challenges. A key part is to 'myth bust', and show that despite a number of advances in technology, using a prosthesis is, for most people, about enabling them to carry out aspects of their daily living.

It is hoped that in the future, when assessors encounter people living with limb loss, they will be more aware of the challenges that the person might face, and will be able to draw out further relevant information relating to the claim that person is making. Getting the decision right first time will obviously negate the need to go through the process of challenging the decision, and Blesma feels having this awareness should enable the assessors to produce an accurate report to enable the Department for Work and Pensions to make the right decision for Members.

Members can also ensure they can have an impact on the decision by making sure they are aware of the rules for the assessments at the start of the process. Please contact your Blesma Support Officer if you have a disability benefit claim form to fill in, or an assessment to attend, and they can assist. Please make them aware as soon as possible as the process can be time consuming.

SOCIAL SECURITY SCOTLAND

We have written before on the changes to the benefits system in Scotland, where there are new devolved powers for the Scottish government to be able to make its own legislation for a small number of benefits. This will be known as Disability Assistance.

Blesma is engaging with Scottish Social Security as they develop the changes in order to ensure they are aware of the issues for our Members. We have recently responded to a consultation on Disability Assistance. This is where the Scottish government is looking at its replacement for Personal Independence Payment, Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance, the disability benefits for either working age or pension age claimants.

As well as some new rules, the assessments for Disability Assistance will be carried out by Social Security Scotland and fully supported by public sector healthcare professionals rather than the current Department for Work and Pensions process of contracting the assessments to the private sector. Blesma has already offered its support with training the assessors in the same way it is now doing for the current system as mentioned above.

The roll-out of Disability Assistance will be staggered depending on the age of the claimant:

- New claims for Disability Assistance for children and young people will start in Summer 2020
- Claims for older people's disability payments will open by the end of 2020
- Disability benefits for working age people will open in early 2021

It may also be that in the future, our Members in Scotland can get involved directly with engagement with Scottish Social Security to help develop the new system. We will keep you aware of the relevant developments in Scotland as they happen. In the meantime, if any Members in Scotland have any questions, please contact your Blesma Support Officer Steve Burton, or Liz Watling in the Independence and Wellbeing Team.

SUPPORT WITH MANAGING FINANCES

Managing day-to-day money matters can be difficult. Some people may not have the skills to budget for their daily living expenses, or may experience an event that changes their financial situation. A sudden illness or disability, for example, may mean they are no longer able to work, and so can no longer pay their debts. You may wish to find out how to 'future proof' your finances, and Blesma would like to raise awareness of a couple of organisations that can give you information.

CHRISTIANS AGAINST POVERTY

Christians Against Poverty is a national charity that can support those with financial difficulties, regardless of faith, whether it be with budgeting skills or managing debt. It can also offer practical help with seeking employment and managing life-controlling habits such as smoking and gambling.

Debt Help

Christians Against Poverty helps a client to prioritise their living costs and can negotiate with any creditors to arrange a repayment plan based on what the client can afford out of their agreed budget. If necessary, CAP can advise on insolvency options.

Job Clubs

These clubs help jobseekers gain the tools, skills and confidence to step back into employment. There are 156 Job Clubs across the UK. The eight-session course takes people through each stage of the job hunting process, from identifying strengths and skills, to writing a CV and learning how to succeed once in employment.

Fresh Start

This is group support to help people find freedom from life-controlling habits such as smoking, gambling or drinking. The groups provide supportive communities where people can meet regularly and work through a course designed to help them break free from their dependency.

Christians Against Poverty Life Skills

Low income is the most common reason people fall into debt. This is group support (there are 93 groups across the UK) designed to give confidence and decision-making skills needed to survive on a low income. It includes practical money saving techniques such as cooking on a budget, living healthily on less, and making money go further.

If you would like more information on Christians Against Poverty and the support it can offer in your area, *please visit www.capuk.org or contact the helpline on 0800 328 0006*. The charity is non-judgmental about the reasons people are having difficulty, but if you are nervous about making contact please get in touch with your Blesma Support Officer, who will be able to help.

FORCES MONEYPLAN

Forces MoneyPlan offers free financial guidance from a professional and independent Financial Adviser. It was created to help sick and injured veterans and Forces personnel manage their finances more effectively. Financial Advisers have volunteered their time and expertise to provide guidance in person, via telephone or Skype depending on your preference. It's a completely free service and there is no obligation to continue after your consultation.

Forces MoneyPlan is designed to help with a broad range of financial concerns, including:

- Ensuring you and your family have greater control over your day-to-day finances (including debt)
- Helping you understand how you might better manage your finances
- Helping you build a financial plan for the future
- Helping you to make informed choices based on a better understanding of the different types of savings, investments, pensions and protection products available
- Helping you avoid financial scams

You can access more information and register in any of the following ways:

- Get in touch with your regional Blesma Support Officer
- Phone Forces MoneyPlan on 07900 226151
- Request an application form by writing to Forces MoneyPlan, Personal Finance Society, 21 Lombard Street, London EC3V 9AH

If further advice is required, this will be provided by an Independent Financial Adviser identified by Forces MoneyPlan. There may be a charge for this ongoing advice.

BLUE BADGE

The Blue Badge Scheme allows people with severe mobility problems, registered blind people, and people

with severe disabilities within both arms, to park close to places they wish to visit. The scheme is available in all parts of the UK, but there are a number of differences depending on which part of the UK you live in. In England, from 30 August, new regulations will extend the eligibility to people whose mental health or 'disability' impacts on their ability to walk during the course of a journey. If you have been turned down for a Blue Badge in England before but feel you may qualify under this new route, please reapply after the rule change date.

If you are receiving a disability benefit you will automatically qualify for a Blue Badge but will still have to request one. The automatic qualification route is either being registered blind, or being in receipt of one of the following:

- Disability Living Allowance higher rate mobility component
- War Pensioners Mobility Supplement
- Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (within tariff 1-8) and have been certified as having a permanent and substantial disability that causes inability or very considerable difficulty in walking
- (In Wales) receive Armed Forces Compensation Scheme due to permanent mental disorder (tariff 6)
- (In England and Northern Ireland) have been awarded eight points or more in the 'Moving around' activity of Personal Independence Payment
- (In Scotland and Wales) have been awarded eight points or more in the 'Moving around' activity or 12 points or more in the 'Planning and following journeys' activity
- (In Scotland) previously had a fixed term award of Disability Living Allowance higher rate mobility component, have not been awarded the appropriate points within the Personal Independence Payment re-assessment, and you have asked for a Mandatory Reconsideration within the last year
- (In Scotland) previously had an indefinite or lifetime award of Disability Living Allowance, which has been

terminated following a Personal Independence Payment reassessment

If you do not meet the automatic qualification route, you may be entitled under the 'assessed route'. You may have to evidence your level of difficulty by attending an assessment. This assessment is open to those who can evidence one of the following:

- Have a 'permanent and substantial disability which causes an inability to walk, or very considerable difficulty in walking'
- Drive regularly, have a severe disability in both arms and are unable to operate, or have considerable difficulty in operating, all or some types of parking meter
- (In Scotland) are unable to walk or virtually unable to walk because of a temporary but substantial disability which is likely to last for a period of 12 months but less than three years
- (In Scotland) have a diagnosed mental disorder and lack an awareness of the danger from traffic. For this route you must also be getting one of the following:
 - Disability Living Allowance middle or highest rate care component
 - Attendance Allowance
 - Personal Independence Payment daily living component and scored eight points or more in either the 'Communicating verbally', 'Reading and understanding signs, symbols and words' or 'Engaging with other people face to face' activities
- (In Wales) as a result of a severe cognitive impairment are unable to follow the route of any journey without the help of someone else
- (In Wales) have a terminal illness that seriously limits your mobility
- (In Wales) if you are recovering from, or awaiting treatment for, a serious illness or injury you can apply for a temporary 12-month badge
- (In England from 30 August 2019) the current requirement that the disability is 'permanent and

substantial' will be changed to 'enduring and substantial'. This is deemed more appropriate to encompass non-physical conditions such as mental and cognitive disabilities, or 'hidden' conditions such as irritable bowel conditions. They may be difficult to categorise as permanent since they may vary over time, but endure nonetheless. The new criteria will be extended to those who

- Cannot undertake a journey without there being a risk of serious harm to their health or safety, or that of any other person (such as young children with autism)
- Cannot undertake a journey without it causing them very considerable psychological distress
- Have very considerable difficulty when walking (both the physical act and experience of walking)

How to apply for a Blue Badge

Applications are processed by local authorities, or in Northern Ireland by the Blue Badge processing unit.

Applications in England, Scotland and Wales

Contact your local authority or claim online by visiting www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge There will be a maximum fee of £10 in England and £20 in Scotland. It is free in Wales.

Applications in Northern Ireland

Contact the Blue Badge processing unit by calling 0300 200 7818 or by visiting www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/apply-or-renew-blue-badge There will be a set fee of £10.

Is the grass greener on the other side?

Over the past few months a number of Members have raised questions about changing Limb Centres and if this is possible cross border within the UK. Questions about getting a second opinion have also been raised.

Prosthetic services in the UK are provided by the home nation NHS. In Scotland (five centres), Wales (three centres) and Northern Ireland (one centre), the limb service is 'in house', that is to say all of the staff are directly employed by the NHS. In England, the majority of the 35 Limb Centres are operated for the NHS by contractors. These contractors are Steeper, OpCare, and Blatchfords, and they provide the clinical services. Although each NHS administration has devolved policies for prosthetic provision, it is relatively equitable and it is often the relationship a patient has with their prosthetist that is the key driver for successful outcomes.

As a general rule, an amputee patient should access the services of a Limb Centre in the country in which they are normally resident and registered with a GP. Limb Centres are geographically spread to reduce the distances a patient would need to travel to access appropriate services. In most cases, a patient will be referred to the Limb Centre affiliated with the hospital where the amputation was carried out or close to where they live. Patients do have the ability to elect to change the Limb Centre at which they are treated, within the country they live. Only in exceptional cases will a patient be able to move to a Limb Centre in another country of the UK. Funding for such an arrangement would have to be agreed by the NHS of both countries.

Any request to change Limb Centre should be made via your GP, who should refer you to the new centre with an explanation of the reason for the relocation. Once approved, the receiving centre will send you an appointment where you are likely to meet with the multi-discipline team and a plan for your treatment or care will be agreed.

If the reason for you wishing to change Limb Centre is based on the care you feel you are currently receiving it may be worth discussing this with your Blesma Support Officer or BSO (Prosthetics) first. You might be advised to seek a second opinion from other clinicians at the centre or at another centre. A second opinion at another centre can be arranged either through your GP or the current Limb Centre. This is based on your right as a patient to request a second opinion from another consultant-led team.

If you are experiencing any problems with prosthetic provision or care, please contact your BSO (see p34 for contact details) or BSO (Prosthetics) on 020 8548 7080 for individual support and advice



Health and travel costs update

As previously reported in *Blesma Magazine* and the *Bulletin*, Blesma continues to seek clarity regarding the payment of travel costs for our Members when they travel to an NHS Limb Centre for repair or maintenance of their prosthetic limb or limbs.

The current system allows for those in receipt of a War Pension for an amputation to claim reimbursement of travel costs when attending a Limb Centre under the NHS Health Travel Costs Scheme. A lack of standardisation still exists across some NHS Centres, and as and when we are made aware of individual problems, we bring this to the attention of the NHS and Department of Health who are taking this issue seriously. We have intervened on behalf of individuals and also provided advice to those Limb Centres that were 'confused' by their own system.

As it stands, the NHS is responsible for payment of legitimate claims by War Pensioner amputee patients. Where there is a need to confirm eligibility, the claim form (HC5(T)) should be sent to Veterans UK who, having confirmed eligibility for this benefit, return the form to the originating hospital or Limb Centre for payment. Veterans UK does not pay this claim, and in all cases of difficulty please contact BSO (Prosthetics), who will advocate on your behalf.

Those who have received an Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Award are currently unable to claim their travel costs under this scheme. Any patient who feels that the costs of attending their Limb Centre are prohibitive may submit a claim if they are on a low income; this will be means tested before a decision is made.

It is therefore unlikely that anyone in receipt of an AFCS award and associated payments will qualify under this rule.



Useful contact numbers across the Association

TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
BLESMA SUPPORT OFFICERS			
BSO (Prosthetics)	Brian Chenier	020 8548 7080 07796 715908	bsoprosthetics@blesma.org
BSO Eastern	Kevin Long	020 3954 3020 07825 536364	bsoeastern@blesma.org
BSO London & South East	Paul Findlay	01268 415290 07469 242277	bsolse@blesma.org
BSO Midlands	Sam Wileman	020 8548 7095 07825 536363	bsomid@blesma.org
BSO North East	Pete Shields	01469 532176 07908 667219	bsone@blesma.org
BSO North West	Mike Downes	01257 795144 07825 536362	bsonw@blesma.org
BSO Scotland, NI & ROI	Steve Burton	0131 2262910 07766 258461	bsosniroi@blesma.org
BSO South	Pat Donnachie	07741 846106	bsosouth@blesma.org
BSO South West	Steve Fraser	01278 789393 07788 312747	bsosw@blesma.org
BSO West	Tom Hall	020 8548 7098 07780 165085	bsowest@blesma.org
Members Living Overseas	Liz Watling	020 8548 3516	iwabenefits@blesma.org
BLESMA OUTREACH OFFICERS			
National Outreach Coordinator	Martin Gwillim	07741 891632	outreachcoord@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Eastern	Darren Fuller	07741 661159	outreache@blesma.org
Outreach Officer London & South East	Alida Horne	07741 845793	outreachlse@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Midlands	Vanessa Lucas	07741 845429	outreachmid@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Northern Ireland	Fiona Morrison	07741 744617	outreachni@blesma.org
Outreach Officer North East	Adele Miller	07741 847211	outreachne@blesma.org
Outreach Officer North West	Kirsten Morrissey	07741 846674	outreachnw@blesma.org

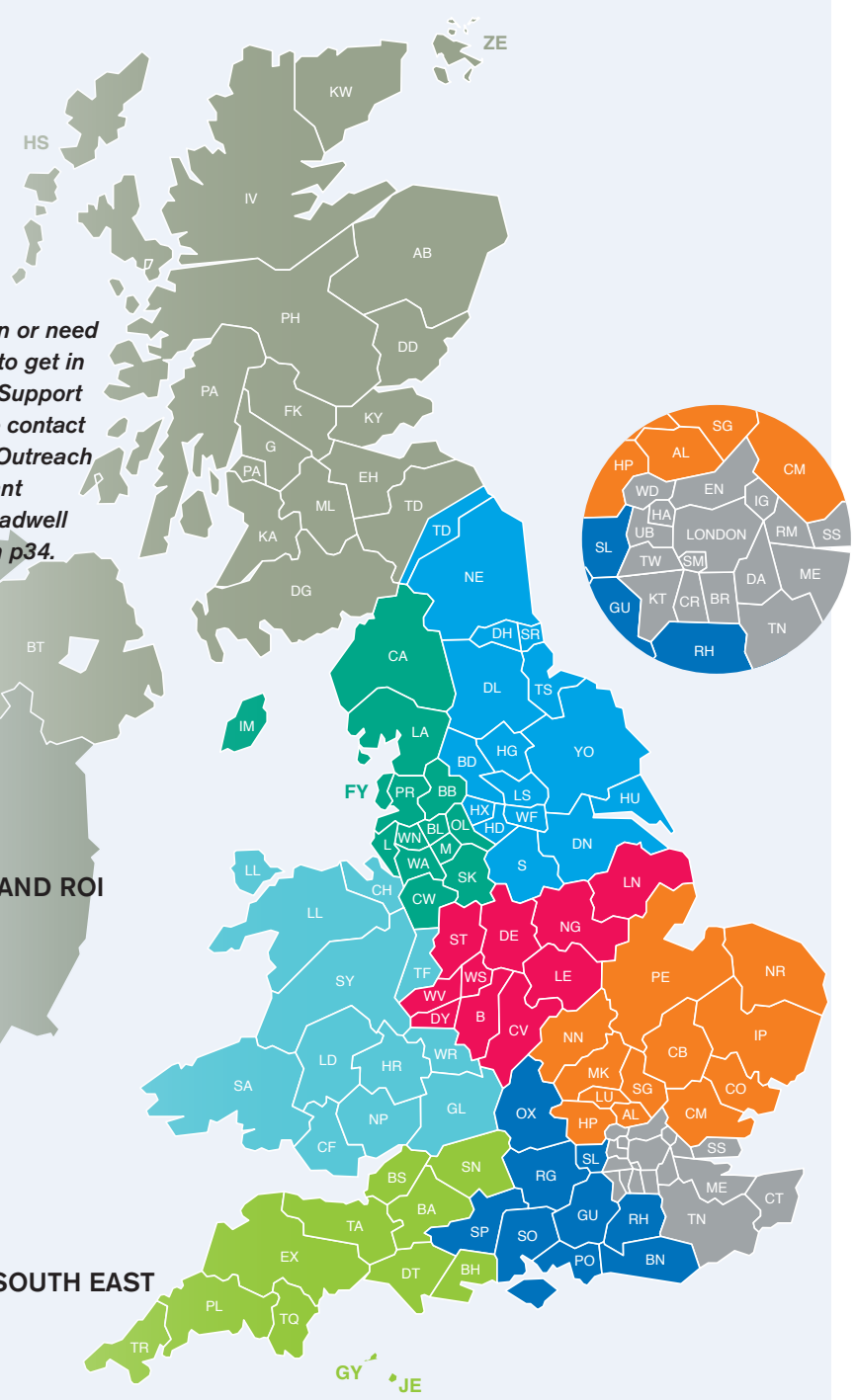
CONTACT DETAILS

TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
BLESMA OUTREACH OFFICERS Cont			
Outreach Officer South	Andy Barlow	07384 834449	outreachsouth@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South West	Sarah Payne	07741 737563	outreachsw@blesma.org
Outreach Officer West	Jason Suller	07741 744141	outreachw@blesma.org
INDEPENDENCE AND WELLBEING			
Members Support	Liz Watling	020 8548 3516	iwabenefits@blesma.org
Members Admin	Elaine Hems	020 8548 7093	memberadmin@blesma.org
Grants Admin	Susie Grainger	020 3954 3022	grantsadmin@blesma.org
Members Support	Liz Watling	020 8548 3516	iwabenefits@blesma.org
Welfare – Direct Line		020 8598 9459	
ACTIVITIES			
Activities Manager	Jess March	020 8548 3519	activities@blesma.org
Membership Engagement Officer	Emily Mizon	020 8548 7094	meo@blesma.org
Activities Executive	Clare Wellings	020 3954 3021	ae@blesma.org
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Community & Events Officer	Molly Watson	020 8548 7087	communityeventsofficer@blesma.org
Fundraising Relationship Executive	Abbi Wilkins	020 8548 7084	fundraisingrelexec@blesma.org
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Director Independence and Wellbeing	Heather Betts	020 8548 3515	diw@blesma.org
USEFUL CONTACTS			
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Exec Team and Events Officer	Paula Ferreira	020 8548 3511	execasst@blesma.org
Admin Support	Sue Stokes	020 8548 7091	officeexec@blesma.org

Blesma by area

Have you got a question or need advice? Don't hesitate to get in touch with the Blesma Support Officer in your area. The contact numbers for all BSOs, Outreach Officers, and the relevant members of staff at Chadwell Heath, can be found on p34.

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



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