



Blesma Members remember

The Association pays its respects
at The Cenotaph and across the nation

Inside: Do more things in 2022 with Blesma Activities

The Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees (VAPC's) are seeking new members.

The VAPC is a Non-Departmental Public Body which works with, though independently of, the Ministry of Defence to assist veterans and their families. Their work is undertaken through consultation with Ministers, the Ministry of Defence, Local Authorities and many other providers of services to veterans. The VAPC Members are appointed by The Minister for Defence People and Veterans.

More information is available [here](#).

Are You:

Committed to supporting Veterans and their Families?

A great communicator or networker?

Do you have an understanding of the Armed Forces Covenant and would you like to promote it in your region?

Do you have a special interest in Veterans health, housing, employment, pensions and compensation schemes or any other issue relevant to the Veterans community?

If you would like to apply for a role or obtain further information, please visit [Public Appointments at the Cabinet Office](#) and search for VAPC to locate opportunities available in your local region.

As this is a public appointment undertaken on a voluntary basis this does not attract a salary, however essential expenses associated with the role will be reimbursed.



Blesma Bulletin Winter 2021



It is with much pleasure that I welcome you to this edition of The Bulletin as we look forward to Christmas. Since our last edition, the landscape for all of us feels like it has changed many times as a result of Covid. I am sure we are all relieved that we seem to be out of lockdown, and we

have been able to celebrate this in great style at our Members' Weekend. It was my first; and the warmth and friendliness shared amongst us was simply inspiring. It was a really great weekend with a well organised programme – many thanks must go to our Activities Team, who worked to make the event such a success.

It was also a privilege for me to read out the awards citations of several truly remarkable people who have done so much in supporting Blesma and its Members. I am pleased to say next year's event will revert back to when it is normally held in the Summer.

This month, we say a sad farewell to Elaine Hems, our Membership Administrator, who has served Blesma for 27 years and now leaves on retirement. Elaine has seen much change and has played an integral part in supporting Members. I know we would all like to wish

her the very best as she turns over the page to the next chapter of her life. In this issue we welcome Jackie King who works with me, the BSOs and the Outreach team in managing the award of grants to help improve your independence, wellbeing and quality of life. You can find more on all of our new starters on pages 30-31.

Finally, this is an opportunity for me to note that you can expect to see some changes to our print publications from next year. Currently, you receive three *Bulletins* and four magazines each year. Following feedback, and in line with the times, we will be reducing the number of these printed publications. You will still receive both the magazine and *Bulletin*, but they will now be condensed into one regular quarterly publication. You can expect to receive the first of these 'new look' Blesma Magazines in March.

As we venture into longer nights, please be assured the Blesma team will continue doing all it can to support you. The Outreach Officers have been busy organising Christmas lunches in your area to help end the year on a high note. If you have yet to decide to join one of these socials, do get in touch as there are many who would love to see you. Please remain safe and vigilant.

With my very best wishes to you all.

Ian Harper
Director Independence and Wellbeing



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Members make welcome return to The Cenotaph

Eighteen Blesma Members represented the Association at the National Service of Remembrance at The Cenotaph on Sunday 14 November. The 40-strong Blesma contingent was made up of nine walking wounded and nine Members using scooters and wheelchairs, as well as family, friends and carers.

Blesma Trustee Ali Grant, Chief Executive Jon Bryant and Member Roy Townsend led them as they paid their respects, while Mick Foulds and Peter Sherston-Baker performed the role of wreath bearers.

The Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force were all represented, with attendees ranging in age from 35 to 85 years old. Blesma streamed the event on Facebook Live from Horse Guards, and included interviews with Roy Townsend, Aron Fowler, Peter Sherston-Baker, Ben Cartwright, Ali Grant and Jon Bryant.

Each Member spoke about their time in service, and reflected on Remembrance Day and what it means to them.

LLOYD'S OF LONDON REMEMBRANCE CEREMONY

On Friday 12 November, Blesma attended the Lloyd's Remembrance ceremony. Staff and Members were honoured to attend and were made to feel very welcome. An impromptu lunch ended the morning perfectly.



Eighteen Members paid their respects at The Cenotaph in November



Remembrance 11K is back for its second year

On Sunday 14 November Blesma supporters from around the country took part in the second annual Blesma Remembrance 11K event.

This year, unlike in 2020, a small group of runners were able to meet up at Blesma's offices in Chelmsford and take part together. To see some of our community alongside each other after last year, when restrictions kept us apart, was heart-warming for all involved.

The event was broadcast on Facebook Live, featuring interviews with Blesma's Finance and Support Director Boston Mwense, as well as Members of Anglia Ruskin University's Veterans and Families Institute (VFI). Staff from the VFI, including Dr Hilary Engward who is currently leading on the second instalment of The Blesma Families Project, were able to tell us about the fantastic work the institute does in finding new ways to support the families of our veterans.

Dr Hilary gave us an overview into the new research project and the impact it will have on veterans living with loss of use of limb. This served as a poignant reminder on Remembrance Day to not only spare a thought for those we have lost, but to continue to work for a brighter future for those with life-changing injuries.

All the runners who returned to Blesma Chelmsford were presented with their Remembrance 11K



Above: Member Nick Eley and the team from Anglian Ruskin's VFI



medals, and a well-earned sports drink and energy bar, kindly donated by Tesco Princes Road.

All in all, the event was a huge success once again. Despite fewer runners taking part this year

because of the resumption of more traditional Remembrance Sunday activities, those who did join us had a fantastic time and shared many photos of their efforts.

A huge thank you once again to all of those who took part – we look forward to seeing you next year!

You can watch Blesma's Remembrance 11K livestream and catch up with the Member interviews from Horse Guards on the Association's Facebook page

New research into living with loss of use of limb/s

Blesma, with the Veterans and Families Institute for Military Social Research (VFI) at Anglia Ruskin University, is working on the groundbreaking project *The Family Experience of Living with Loss of Use of Limb*.

It may surprise you that this is the first project of this type, both in the UK and internationally. Your involvement in this research would mean being integral in informing how loss of use of limb is understood in the veteran and civilian health and social care services and charities. Importantly, this will directly affect how Blesma supports you and your family.

The project started in September 2020, and so far 13 veterans and 11 family members have been interviewed about their everyday experiences of living with loss of use of limb/s. We have already learned from what Members have told us, particularly about how injury and diagnoses disrupt lives, and what this often does to the family and, importantly, how this has been managed by Members and their families over long periods of time.

However, we have a lot more to listen to and learn from. In 2022, we will be looking to learn more about your experiences and those of your family. To do this, we will be inviting:

- Members with loss of use of limb/s to fill in an online

questionnaire. (Paper copies will be available and will take less than 10 minutes to complete)

- Family members to complete a different questionnaire. This will also be online (with paper copies being made available) and will take less than five minutes to complete
- Members and their families to take part in individual interviews. To ensure we are Covid-secure, we hope to do this by the research team coming to visit you in your home. If it is not possible or preferable to meet

in person, we will instead invite you to talk with us online using Zoom.

We will be doing all this in early 2022 and will send invites to participate to all relevant Members, so please watch out for an invite to be part of this exciting project.

To find out more about the project please email Maria Iancu at maria.iancu@aru.ac.uk



Professional Patients Invitation

Keele University is looking for professional patients. Might you be interested?

DO YOU FIT THE CRITERIA?

- Do you use a prosthesis/artificial limb or orthosis/splint/brace?
- Are you willing to give up time to train future professionals?
- Are you willing to travel to Keele University?
- Do you have a desire to help the healthcare profession by supporting students?

IF YES, THE TEAM WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU

- **Are my travel costs reimbursed?** Yes
- **Where is Keele University?** In Stoke-on-Trent
- **How long will I be there?** Half a day/all day
- **Over how many days/weeks?** Two to four days per year

For more information contact Stephanie Conover at stephanie.conover@nhs.net

Jason Hare named Inspiration of the Year



Royal Marine Jason Hare was named Inspiration of the Year and Scottish Veterans Awards Champion at the inaugural Scottish Veterans Awards on 06 October.

Jason was recognised for his dedication to supporting the veteran and wider communities after suffering life-changing injuries during service.

Jason was injured twice whilst serving in Afghanistan. On his second tour he was injured by a suicide bomber and on his third tour he stepped on an improvised explosive device. He suffered severe facial damage and scarring, which resulted in the loss of his left eye and his nose being amputated. Jason also lost his left leg below the knee and several fingers on his right hand.

“I was nominated by a colleague at Horseback UK, where I work as the course director,” said Jason. “I was totally shocked that I won, and feel very proud and humbled, especially at the inaugural awards.”

“I work with Horseback UK, volunteer as a Royal Marines Support Network Officer and work with children who are disengaged from the educational system. I’ve spent the last 11 years dedicating my time to the veterans community as well as the wider community, and am proud to have been recognised for the hard work I have put in.”

Jason received a specially commissioned piece that was made by Dan Earp-Jones, a military veteran and owner of Veteran Trees.

Martin Hewitt sets out on world record challenge

Adaptive explorer and Blesma Member Martin Hewitt is embarking on a bid to become the first disabled person to reach the South Pole unsupported and unassisted from the edge of Antarctica.

The former Paratrooper, whose right arm was paralysed when he was shot in Afghanistan in 2007, aims to complete the 1,000km trek in 45 days. He will be guided by Louis Rudd MBE, Director of Expeditions at Shackleton and the only person to have crossed Antarctica on foot twice.

They will travel across the world's coldest, windiest, and highest continent while hauling 95kg of food and equipment without resupply.

"After months of physical and mental preparation, I feel ready to take on this challenge and can't wait to get a step closer to completing the Adaptive Grand Slam," said Martin. "I hope that by succeeding in this challenge I can show people that you can achieve anything you set your mind to if you have support, drive and determination, and that a debilitating injury should never stand in your way."

The South Pole trek marks the penultimate phase of Martin's attempt to complete the Adaptive Grand Slam, an adaptation of the infamous Explorer's Grand Slam which involves climbing the



highest peak on every continent and walking to both Poles.

The South Pole trek is the first part of a two-phase expedition during which Martin will also attempt to climb Mount Vinson, Antarctica's highest mountain.

In his Antarctica endeavour, Martin has been supported by

Blesma along with several other sponsors.

*To read Martin's blog visit www.adaptivegrandslam.com
For more on the expedition and to follow Martin every step of the way visit www.shackleton.com/pages/adaptive-antarctica*

Rob Bugden now has the freedom to explore



Rob Bugden can explore the beaches of South Wales for the first time since he was injured thanks to a motorised track device part funded by Blesma. Freedom Trax is an attachment that has been designed for manual wheelchairs, and allows Rob's wheelchair to traverse sand, snow, gravel and mud. The device has allowed Rob to return to his "happy place" much to the delight of his dog, Denzel.

"Freedom Trax is an attachment that works a bit like tank tracks that fits onto my manual chair and allows me to go off road," said the former RAF Physical Training Instructor, who was involved in a parachute accident that left him paralysed from the chest down. "My favourite place in the world



is the beach, but I haven't been able to go since I was injured almost six years ago.

"The device is a complete game changer. It doesn't matter if it's muddy outside now as I can still take the dog across the field. I was a little apprehensive on my first trip as the attachment is expensive and grant funded, but I was full of relief and happiness when it worked. The device does everything I had hoped for, but I would never have been able to get it without the support I have received from Blesma."

Rob is now enjoying exploring different beaches each weekend with Denzel.

Helping our Members to lead our Members

Blesma is investing in training and qualifications to give Members who choose to lead an activity the knowledge and training that is required to run an event successfully.

Blesma's ethos of Member helping Member is at the heart of Blesma activities. COVID-19 gave the Association a chance to reflect on how it can create an environment that not only has the safety of its Members at the forefront but how it also mentors and empowers its 'Member leads'.

With that in mind, Blesma will empower its Member leads by providing training, funding qualifications and/or sourcing specialist instructors to support the member in leading the activity.

"Member supporting Member is a key principle of the Association," said Chief Executive Jon Bryant. "We want to enable our Members to turn their idea into reality, so if they need assistance in doing that we will look to provide it."

Any Member can suggest an activity that they would like to lead on, or can offer to volunteer their time assisting on one of Blesma's activities.

If you would like to lead or suggest an event, please contact the Activities Team by email at activities@blesma.org with a proposal, or apply via the website

Blesma Freemason Charity Initiative 2021

Following a request from Ian Harper, Blesma's Director Independence and Wellbeing, Grand Master Most Worshipful Brother Jeremy Stevens declared the Association his designated Charity Concern for his first year of tenure in office at The Grand Lodge of British Freemasons in Germany. He launched this initiative with a pledge of 3,000 Euros. A call for support to their constituent lodges, and other orders, was sent out earlier this year and was met with a fantastic and heart-warming response.

By the end of September, the comparatively small Grand Lodge had collected 8,000 Euros for the Association, with many other Masonic Orders in Germany also contributing.

Christopher Bilson was delighted to meet with Ian Harper in Herford, Germany in October at the Rose of Minden Lodge house and present him with a symbolic cheque.

"I am absolutely delighted and humbled by such a generous donation from the Grand Lodge,"

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Ian Harper (middle) accepts a cheque from the Grand Lodge in Germany

said Ian. "This will go a long way to helping those who need to know they are not forgotten."

Ian is a mason, having been initiated into Britannia Lodge No 843 in February 1992, and it is through masonry that he has got

to know the masons behind this generous donation personally.

On behalf of all at Blesma, we would like to thank the German Grand Lodge for their generous support and donation.

A rescue service for the disabled world

Providing vital and potentially life-saving help and support to people with all kinds of disabilities, as well as their families and carers, Skiggle has amassed a membership of more than 7,500 across the UK and is continually growing. It is the only charity of its kind in the UK to specifically help when access to disability care products and equipment is urgently needed.

The Skiggle SOS emergency alert service sees a community come together around-the-clock to answer urgent calls for help from people all over the country. You could be away from home and realise you've forgotten a crucial piece of equipment that would be almost impossible to get hold of at short notice. What would you do if you need, or are caring for someone who needs, a feeding tube or catheter, or a slide board to get in and out of bed? These aren't things you can pick up in a supermarket, but contact Skiggle and someone could be geographically close enough to help you out in an emergency.

The Skiggle Marketplace regularly helps people find a wide range of disability and special needs care products and equipment. The safe, fully regulated platform offers a place for people to rehome unopened or surplus items such as incontinence pads and clinical dressings, to larger mobility and



The charity Skiggle helps with urgent access to disability care products and equipment



bathing aids. In recent months, listings on the Skiggle Marketplace have almost doubled as more people become aware of the charity and realise that perfectly safe, sealed items can be rehomed and not thrown away as is too often instructed. In times of stock shortages or supply chain delays, the Skiggle Marketplace is one of the only places where people can source vital supplies, and potentially avoid traumatic hospital stays.

If you're interested in finding out more and using the charity's services, you can register for free

to become part of a thriving network of like-minded people. Skiggle is the safety net you need to give you peace of mind to live your fullest, happiest life. With Skiggle, life always comes before any disability.

"As with all great ideas it is often the simplest that have the most impact," says Brian Chenier, Blesma's BSO (Prosthetics). "I have seen the distress caused when a Member realises that they have left a vital piece of kit at home. Having the Skiggle network to reach out to for immediate support is great."

To learn more about Skiggle visit www.skiggle.co.uk

“The fact that we were all together was fantastic”

A Blesma-funded trip has allowed an injured veteran to enjoy a family holiday for the first time since he was paralysed from the neck down three years ago.

Rob Butt joined his wife Kathy and their three teenage children – Ralph, Giles and Emelia – as they enjoyed some quality time together and embarked on many adventure activities at the Calvert Trust Exmoor in July. As a family, they abseiled, climbed, kayaked, did archery, visited the stables and much more.

“We had a wonderful time. Everyone really enjoyed it and we loved doing the cycling, canoeing, and climbing,” said Rob, who was injured in Malta when the tour bus he was travelling in went through low-hanging branches. “The fact that I was able to do abseiling and archery with the help of some amazing instructors, and being all together on holiday for the very first time was fantastic.”

Kathy added: “It was hugely important for the children to be with their dad. We don’t like leaving Rob on family trips, so seeing his response as he came down a wall in a wheelchair was incredible.

“We had to have two carers along with us, so while the prices were very reasonable for what the Calvert Trust offers, it was a lot for us to fund seven people.



It was tremendous that Blesma could support the trip and enable us to go somewhere so that Rob could fully participate.”

In the three years since Rob was injured, Blesma has supported the Butt family – from helping get Rob home for Christmas before the house was adapted to offering therapy for the whole family.

“In the beginning, it was really challenging to finance significant building costs so Rob could access the house,” said Kathy. “I was at a



low ebb because I was repeatedly rejected for support. My mother-in-law was about to sell her house and downsize so we could have Rob back home with us.

“When Blesma and BSO Steve Fraser came onto the scene, it was amazing. Steve has the expert knowledge that takes away so much of the stress of dealing with getting used to life being so different. His organisational skills, kindness and empathy were life-changing for all of us.”

In memory of Lee Crichton

Lee Crichton was a well-loved member of the Parachute Regiment and an avid fundraiser for military causes, including Blesma. His friend Pete Ellis writes in his memory:

Lee was well known at battalion level within The Parachute Regiment for his fantastic work. As an ex-Parachute Regiment soldier, he was the safe hands and driving force for a support group called The Pegasus Appreciation Group.

Sadly, he had to take a step back from this due to his poor health. He sadly passed away at the age of 58 from complications after contracting COVID-19 following a heart operation.

Lee was instrumental in raising £200,000 towards Airborne Forces good causes. He supported people who had fallen on hard times, and through his charity work he donated thousands of pounds to good and deserving causes. One of Lee’s favourites was Blesma, and during his life he donated around £6,500 to the Association.

He supported limbless veterans to ride Route 66 in America, and paid for much-needed university books for an ex-soldier to study for a degree. His charity work seemed endless.

After Lee’s passing, his friends banded together to have a plaque made and a tree planted at the rear



of Airborne Museum Hartenstein, which was the HQ for Airborne Forces during the battle of Arnhem. We were ecstatic to hear that the management and Trustees agreed to this tree and plaque, and we set out to raise the £600 needed to pay for them. We also agreed that anything over this amount would be donated to Lee’s favourite charity: Blesma.

The group managed to raise £1,000 and stopped there. Sadly, this memorial was unable to take place. As a result, it was agreed that the £888 that was left over after the plaque and Gofundme commission would be donated to Blesma in the name of Lee.

So it is with great pride and honour that we have donated £888.01 to Blesma in the memory and the name of our dear friend Lee Crichton to support the Association in its continuing work.

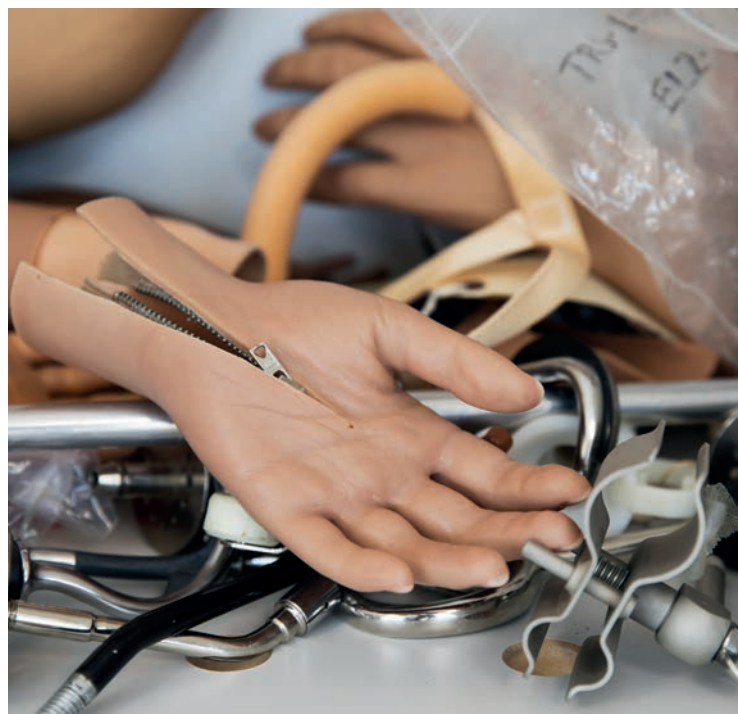
The important role of the healthcare assistant

Following an article in *Blesma Magazine* about the skilled technicians that make up a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT), Brian Chenier, BSO (Prosthetics) spoke to Lisa Meredith, a senior healthcare worker, to find out how the roles of nurses and healthcare assistants shape the care of their patients.

“I’ve been a senior healthcare worker 18 years, seven of which have been at the Specialist Rehabilitation Centre at Seacroft Hospital in Leeds,” says Lisa. “My grandfather was an upper limb amputee and was a member of Blesma. The Association helped him in lots of ways when I was growing up; from providing him with a mobility car to holidays in Blackpool. Blesma was still watching out for my grandmother even after his passing.

“The nursing staff here at Seacroft consists of a clinical nurse specialist and a senior healthcare assistant. We are responsible for wound care, such as looking at any sores or grazes for prosthetic limb users. As a regional centre, we also take care of any other wounds which our patients present with such as rubs or blisters, and we deal with any concerns about their limb or other matters that we can possibly help them with.

“We provide lots of advice on how to look after limbs and general wellbeing, as well as providing



help, advice and information on other services such as occupational therapy, psychology, the hot foot clinic, wheelchair services and much more.

“We organise and support our consultant’s clinics, making sure the patients are fit and well and can attend their appointments by telephoning them the day before

“Patients know they can contact us if they have any concerns about their amputation. We get to know them well - they are as much a part of the centre as we are”



Lisa Meredith (far left) has been a senior healthcare worker for 18 years

a number of years I still love it when one of our physiotherapy patients takes their first steps using their own prosthetic limb before eventually walking out of our department. Nothing gives me a greater thrill!

“The NHS was under a lot of pressure during Covid, and our Prosthetic Service had to close for a while as NHS staff were redeployed to the main hospital sites. After only a few weeks, I was very lucky to be brought back to the centre to help with emergency appointments and to keep the centre open.

“As we began to recover from the pandemic, restarting our clinics and opening up the department even for limited numbers, has needed many changes. We have had to rearrange our centre so that we can see patients in a safe and Covid-secure environment. We have now opened up to more patients and are getting back to some kind of normality, which means the backlog is starting to ease.

“At our centre we aim to be the best at what we do and to help in any way we can so that our patients feel they are welcomed and well looked after.”

they are due in. We check to make sure they are able to make their own way to their appointment, or if they need assistance we can arrange transport through our admin team.

“We greet them on arrival and are available throughout their appointment to support them whilst they are on site.

“Patients come to us after their amputation for rehab with our physiotherapy team. We advise regarding treatment options for wound dressings, as many have

unhealed surgical wounds, and liaise with district nurses for ongoing care.

“I love working at the centre as we get to know all our patients and see them progress through their rehabilitation, adapting to life as an amputee. Patients know that we are here any time, and that they can contact us if they have any concerns regarding their amputation. We get to know them quite well, and they are as much a part of the centre as we are.

“Despite having been here for

Widows Week 2021

Having been lucky enough to be selected for the Widows Week in Hayling Island the time was getting nearer to depart. Attending somewhere on your own again without your husband is a daunting thought. It was, however, something I needed to do to move on, and I was very grateful for the opportunity.

On arrival on Monday afternoon at Sinah Warren we were greeted by Outreach Officer Andy Barlow and BSO Pat Donnachie. They introduced us all and made us feel at home, although I couldn't help wondering what they had done to deserve having to spend a week with seven widows!

We were soon all getting to know one another, having a good natter and trying to remember each other's names. Having things in common and understanding what each other was going through meant that we were soon chatting like we were good friends.

After an early but very nice breakfast on Tuesday morning, we ventured out on our arranged Vineyard Tour. The weather was awful, but Andy assured us that he had ordered sunshine and that it would be there when we arrived at Hambledon Vineyard. Sure enough, just as Pat was parking, the sun appeared like someone had waved a magic wand! This was surely a sign of what was to come.



Stansted House provided a stunning backdrop for a delicious cream tea

We had a wonderful afternoon with our guide who showed us the very interesting working background of the winery. Afterwards, all that was left to do was to indulge in the complimentary wine tasting. We were invited inside, served cheese and biscuits, and offered several wines to taste. The view looking over the rolling hills of vines made it a very relaxing afternoon.

On Wednesday, Pat and Andy had another exciting day planned. They had arranged for a visit to Stansted House, a country house on the border of Hampshire and Sussex. As well as a lovely tour of the house they had organised a superb cream tea on the large terrace. We talked, laughed and reminisced while looking out over the extensive grounds and out to

“The one thing that we all had in common was being a Blesma Widow. It would be a new way of life that we needed to get used to”



“It was something I needed to do to move on, and I was very grateful for the opportunity”

arrival. From the minute we arrived nothing was too much trouble for them. They watched out and cared for each of us, making sure we were looked after and content.

Thursday was another great morning, and we were all booked in for a spa treatment of our choice. After being spoiled with a lazy morning all that was left was for a little shopping trip to Gunwharf Quays.

Sadly, Friday came around all too soon. We all made new friends, exchanged phone numbers and hoped that we would all get to see each other again in the near future.

The Sinah Warren hotel was amazing – the food, staff and rooms were all faultless. Our biggest thanks, however, go to Blesma for making this happen.

Denise Fitzgerald



sea. The sun was shining down on us as we enjoyed the sandwiches and scones. The whole atmosphere was very relaxed!

As we chatted, some of us admitted to having been very apprehensive and a little worried about venturing away on our own – for some it was the first time since losing their husband. Soon, however, some of that worry

disappeared and everyone relaxed and enjoyed their time away. The group all had different lives and stories to tell. The one thing we all had in common, though, was being a Blesma Widow. It would be a new way of life we needed to get used to.

Pat and Andy had obviously been hard at work organising activities in readiness for our

Activities 2022: what's on and how to apply

BLESMA GOLF GROVE SUNDAY DRIVER

Location: Hertfordshire

Date: 20-21 March

Application deadline: 15 January
Blesma will return to the prestigious Grove Hotel for the ultimate experience for the avid golfer. Perfect your skills with the use of the putting green and range, and enjoy two rounds of golf. Members will stay overnight at the Grove Hotel making this a very special occasion.

Who can apply?

Anyone who owns their own clubs and can hit a ball about 100 yards. Buggies will be supplied but may not be permitted on the grass, meaning walking part of the course may be required.

SPRING WIDOWS AND SENIORS WEEKS

Location: Littlecote House, Hungerford

Widows Week date: 09-13 May

Seniors Week date: 16-20 May

Application deadline: 01 February

Based at one of the prestigious Warner hotels, the week focuses on relaxing and socialising with gentle activities and sightseeing in and around Hungerford.

Who can apply?

Seniors Week is open to Members and Widow(er)s over the age of 60 whilst Widows Week is for Widows only.



NRA ADAPTIVE SHOOTING

Location: Bisley, Surrey

Date: 23 June

Application deadline: 01 April
A fantastic chance to re-live and redefine the skills learned on those fun days on the ranges.

Who can apply?

Any Member

ART AND PAINTING COURSE

Location: Somerset

Date: 08-13 July

Application deadline: 01 April
A five-day course for beginners and improvers. Members will take part in fieldwork and studio-based work, visiting a number of outdoor locations before returning to the studio. A great course for Members looking to take up a new

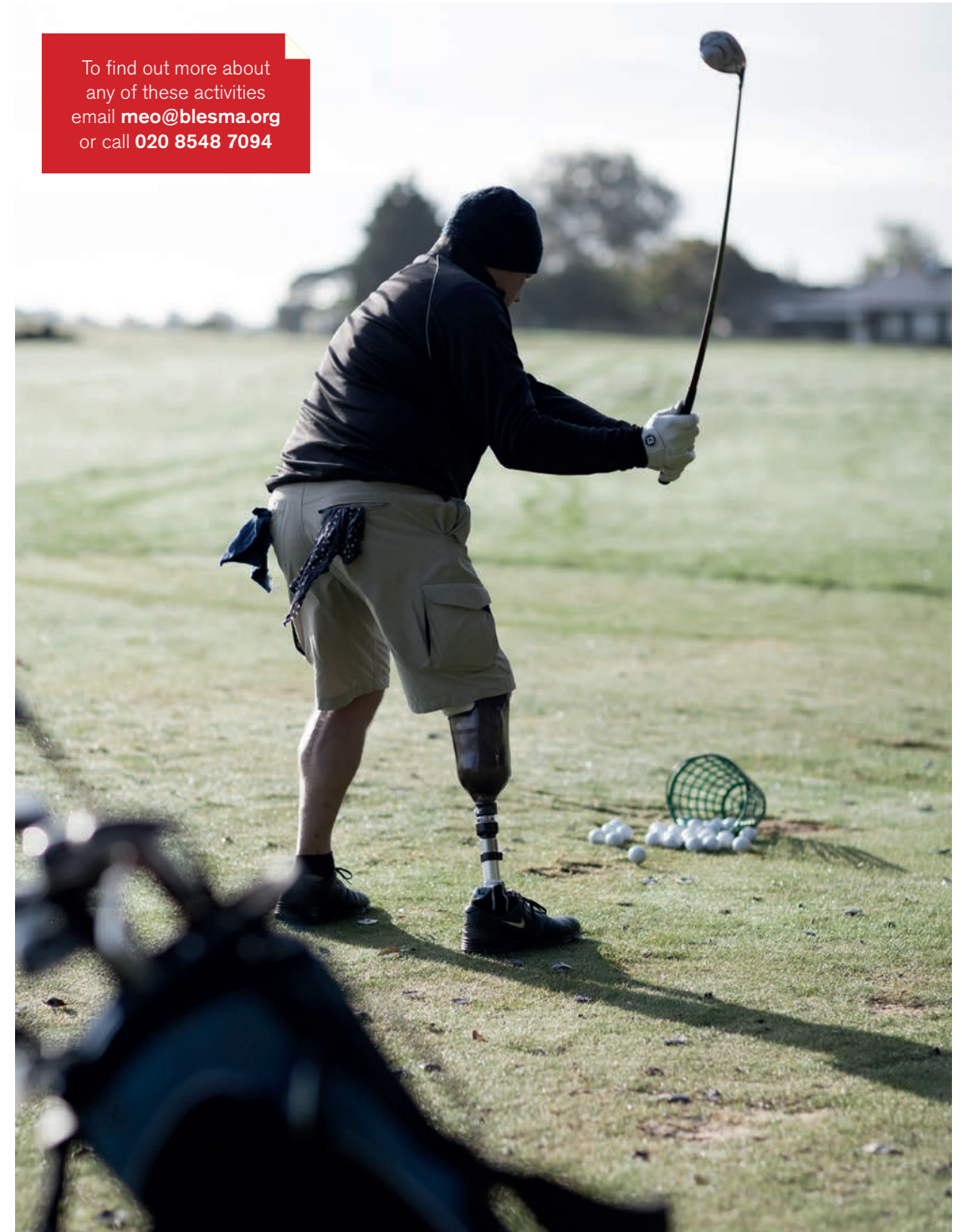


hobby or improve their artistic skills in a relaxed and sociable environment.

Who can apply?

Any Member. Equipment is supplied or you can bring your own. Experienced artists are more than welcome to come along and hone their skills.

To find out more about any of these activities email meo@blesma.org or call 020 8548 7094





To find out more about any of these activities email meo@blesma.org or call 020 8548 7094

SOLDIER RIDE NYC (SRNYC)

Location: New York
Date: 11-19 July
Application deadline: 01 April
 A prestigious event in the cycling calendar and a privilege to be invited back year after year. Cycle around New York for three days with the Wounded Warriors in an event that ends with a huge celebration. An absolute must for any keen cyclist.
Who can apply?
 Anyone who can use some form of adaptive bike. These will be supplied by the Wounded Warrior Project. Please be aware that temperatures will be hot, and you will be expected to cycle for more than 70 miles in three days.

Requirements:

You must be able to enter the USA (ESTA). Your passport must have at least six months' validity during the time of travel. Members must also be double vaccinated.

ISLE OF MAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Location: Isle of Man
Date: 11-18 May
Application deadline: 01 February
 A photography event for all. Explore this stunning island and everything it has to offer, taking pictures of rural places and amazing coastlines.
Who can apply?
 Anyone. No photography experience or camera needed as you can use your phone or tablet.

BATTLEFIELD TOUR

Location: Ypres, Belgium
Date: 28 July-02 August
Application deadline: 01 April
 Flanders has been a place of pilgrimage since The Great War took the lives of more than 750,000 British men. This guided tour provides a poignant opportunity for Members to visit a number of memorial sites – from Tyne Cot Cemetery to The Somme and beyond – to pay their respects whilst learning more about the history and events of World War I.
Who can apply?
 Open to all Members and partners
Requirements:
 Members must be double vaccinated and have a passport with six months' validity.

INTRO TO CYCLING

Location: York
Date: 23 July
Application deadline: 15 April
 This event is aimed at giving an introduction to different forms of adaptive cycling, all under expert guidance. By the end of the event you will be fully informed about the bike that suits you and how to take your cycling to the next level.
Who can apply?
 Any Member. The bikes are supplied.

SHETLAND ISLANDS PHOTOGRAPHY

Date: 22-30 July
Location: Shetland Islands
Application deadline: 15 April
 A chance to get an insider's view of photography on Shetland. Led by a Blesma Member, keen photographer and Shetland resident, Members will get the chance to explore the Shetlands' rugged landscape and wildlife.
Who can apply?
 Anyone with a camera. Wheelchair access can sometimes be limited.

AUTUMN WIDOWS AND SENIORS WEEKS

Location: Somerset
Widows Week date: 19-23 Sept
Seniors Week date: 26-30 Sept
Application deadline: 01 June
 Based at one of the prestigious Warner hotels, the week focuses on relaxing and socialising with gentle activities and sightseeing



in and around Somerset.
Who can apply?
 Seniors Week is open to Members and Widow(er)s over the age of 60 whilst Widows Week is for Widows only.

MEMBERS' WEEKEND *SAVE THE DATE*

Location: Kenilworth
Date: 18-20 June
 Applications are not yet open for Members' Weekend 2022. Further information and an application form will be sent to Members in

January. The event will once again take place at the Chesford Grange Hotel in Kenilworth. If you would like to come along to meet old friends and make some new ones, find out what Blesma Members are up to, and have your say on what Blesma should be focusing on to support Members, please put the date in your diary now.
Who can apply?
 The Weekend is free to all Ordinary and Associate Members and their partners or carers.

Scotland update

by Outreach Officer Emma Gration

OUTREACH UPDATES

July - September

The last few months have been great, and it has been wonderful to get out and about meeting Members for face-to-face activities.

FISHING

On 13 July a group of Members visited Newhouse Fishery, which was accessible for all Members. The weather was fantastic, and lots of sun cream and water was needed. Transport was provided by Fares4Free who offer free transport for veterans, so that meant those of our Members without transport were able to get to the activity easily without having to negotiate difficult public transport routes.

FREE WHEEL NORTH CYCLE TASTER SESSION

On 27 July Members visited Free Wheel North in Glasgow to try out adaptive bikes around the cycle track. These ranged from single hand bikes to double hand bikes and an electric wheelchair bike.



HEALTH WALK

On 05 August Members and their families got together at the Helix Park at the Kelpies for the first of our health walks. More will be coming soon.

ALPACA FARM VISIT

On 11 August Members and their families visited BobCat Alpacas (right) near Edinburgh and met the large alpaca herd. Everyone enjoyed a short walk with the

animals followed by some time hand-feeding the baby alpacas. It was great to see our Blesma Members and their children in the open air and interacting with the animals.

SAILING

Members were booked onto sailing activities on 24 August (Castle Semple) and 08 September (Fife Sailability), but as there wasn't any wind we had to try out kayaking and powerboating instead. I think that the powerboating was the favourite, but it was great to learn that Member Johnny Britton's wife now has her own kayak as a result of the trip.

HAVEN AT VANGUARD – EQUINE THERAPY

The Haven asked if Members would be able to go along and give some feedback on the plans for the new equine therapy centre and its accessibility. Members got to meet the miniature Shetland ponies and some of the liveried horses. There were some fantastic moments with the horses bonding with Members, and I am sure that Blesma Members will be regular visitors once the centre is up and running.

DEEP SEA WORLD

A number of Members travelled with their families from as far north as Forres and as far south as Ayr to visit Deep Sea World in



North Queensferry. It was great to get together as a group and to see Members' children and grandchildren enjoying their time exploring the sea life.

"Thank you so much for hosting

a visit to Deep Sea World," said Lorraine Anderson. "I had been resistant to the idea of attending partly due to the distance involved, but in reality it was probably the fact that I had not really left my

home for such a long time.

"I have realised that it is not so much the activity that is important, but rather the impetus it gives you to set out and take the next steps in launching yourself into the unknown!" said Lorraine.

"It was particularly heart-warming to hear one of the Members at our Zoom quiz the next day enquiring if I had made it home safely. We have a deeper connection now that we have actually met each other and spent time in each other's company. This is a long-winded way of expressing my gratitude."

ONLINE DRAMA PROJECT

Working with the South West Region and Stand Easy Productions, we started an online drama project on 28 October. Members are keen to write a radio play which based around a hospital.



"It is not so much the activity, but rather the impetus it gives you to take the next steps in launching yourself into the unknown!"
Lorraine Anderson

Blesma Awards winners 2020: The citations

At this year's annual gala dinner, which was held at Members' Weekend in October, a number of Blesma Members were crowned worthy winners of the Blesma Awards 2020. The awards serve as recognition and thanks for relentless hard work, dedication and support to the Association. Here are their citations...



THE JACK TRIGG MEMORIAL AWARD 2020

Awarded to: Neil Heritage

The Jack Trigg Memorial Award was established in memory of Blesma Member Jack Trigg who served in the Welsh Guards in World War II and lost an arm in Normandy in 1944. Following Jack's passing, a request was made that a silver salver was purchased to recognise personal endeavours or sporting agility.

This year, it is awarded to Neil Heritage in recognition of his drive and motivation during his rehabilitation, taking to a handcycle as soon as he was able to and progressing through diving instructional qualifications, rowing the Atlantic, sit-skiing, triathlons, and a role as a boot camp instructor.

This led him to establish his own charity, Climb2Recovery, where he continues to inspire many other veterans.

Neil is the embodiment of determination, grit and steadfast refusal to be beaten. The former Royal Signals corporal, who lost both his legs in 2004, had to abandon two previous attempts on The Matterhorn as he neared the 14,692ft summit.

The disappointment was devastating, but Neil's drive, resilience and fortitude shone through, and on the third attempt, even after one of his prosthetic legs fell off 100 metres from the summit, he made history by being the first above-knee amputee to scale The Matterhorn.

This is all the more poignant and astounding from a man who was told he would never walk again.

The Jack Trigg Memorial award is presented to the truly deserving Neil Heritage.



THE CYRIL STEPHENS AWARD 2020

Awarded to: Jean McCreedy

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 to 1947, and National President from 1949 until his death in 1956. It recognises the work undertaken by Blesma supporters.

This year, the Cyril Stephens Award is presented to Jean McCreedy in appreciation of her tireless commitment to fundraising for Blesma since 2013. Jean began fundraising for Blesma alongside her late husband John, who was a Member of the Association. Together, they raised more than £6,600 by attending various events in the local area.

In 2019, Jean threw herself wholeheartedly into fundraising and raising awareness yet again.

She would stand outside local shops with her Blesma bucket, and is immersed in other fundraising, including the production and sale of 'trauma' teddies, with all donations going to Blesma. Jean also encouraged friends and family to donate items to raise funds at car boot sales. In one year, Jean raised an amazing £2,113.

In March 2020, the pandemic physically halted her fundraising activities but did not deter Jean's determination to support Blesma. Instead, she redoubled her efforts, hand-crafting lap and shoulder blankets in Blesma colours.

In Autumn, they were kindly gifted to Members and Widows. It is only fitting that we recognise Jean's exceptional dedication and service to our charity by the award of The Cyril Stephens Award.

Blesma Awards winners (continued)



THE HAMBRO AWARD 2020 Awarded to: Nerys Pearce

This award recognises high achievers in any field who have displayed exceptional commitment and dedication. It was established in memory of Blesma 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 Nerys Pearce in recognition of her remarkable contribution to Blesma, her support to Members throughout her recovery process, and the significant and formidable challenges she has undertaken during the coronavirus crisis.

Since Nerys discovered sport could empower her in her recovery process, she fought to be selected to compete at the Invictus Games, winning 10 medals, culminating in her quality being acknowledged

in her representing Great Britain at the Commonwealth Games.

Nerys has successfully undertaken several elite sporting and arduous events, humbly raising around £20,000 for military charities. This included the 3,000-mile Race Across America, which is labeled the toughest cycle race in the world, in 2019.

In 2020, she set off on a triple endurance fundraising event, followed by an astounding and incredible attempt to swim the English Channel, which she had to unfortunately cut short due to the onset of hyperthermia. Not deterred, Nerys' indomitable spirit and determination meant she quickly dried herself off and picked up the reins to complete a virtual letter to Santa campaign at the end of the year. Nerys is awarded the Hambro Award in recognition of her exceptional achievements and example.



THE FRANKLAND MOORE TROPHY 2020 Awarded to: Peter Sherston-Baker

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 award recognises the work undertaken by Blesma's Welfare Volunteers (known as Welfare Reps).

This year it is awarded to Peter Sherston-Baker in recognition of his 20 years voluntary service to the Bournemouth Branch, where he serves as Branch Chairman and Welfare Officer. Peter has consistently and selflessly placed the care and support for his fellow membership above himself, which was exemplified during

the coronavirus crisis. Putting aside his own significant health challenges, he formulated a plan of regular welfare checks on all 36 Branch members. He selflessly called every Branch member weekly without fail, which provided vital relief, comfort and sense of community to all during a very socially challenging time during lockdown.

Peter provides a hugely valuable service to his local Blesma Support Officer and personifies the very best in Blesma's value of 'Member helping Member.' He is truly deserving of the Frankland Moore Trophy.



THE EARL OF ANCASTER MEMORIAL AWARD 2020 Awarded to: Darran Thompson

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 outstanding work undertaken by a Blesma Volunteer. This year, the Earl of Ancaster Memorial Award is presented to Darran Thompson.

Blesma Member Darran became a volunteer in 2018 after he attended a Blesma photography introduction event and was trained as a digital volunteer. Shortly after, he established a South West photography club where he planned, led and delivered several excellent trips and opportunities to a rapidly growing and appreciative group. As the coronavirus crisis deepened, Darran came into his

own; not deterred by the forced cancellation of all their usual activities, he organised a series of Covid-compliant outdoor events for small groups and successfully established a community of weekly photography workshops via Zoom.

During Covid and its enforced isolation, Darran has been instrumental in providing invaluable support to Members, helping them to connect and navigate online, especially those taking their first steps into conquering digital isolation. His help and personal touch have been inspirational, and helped to create and sustain a strong sense of online Blesma community. At a time of unprecedented need, Darran has epitomised the Blesma ethos of Member helping Member.

It is only fitting that we recognise Darran's dedicated service to Members. He is a most worthy recipient of the Earl of Ancaster Memorial Award.

Meet our new staff members

JACKIE KING GRANTS EXECUTIVE

Tell us about your role...

As Grants Executive there are two aspects to my role: I am responsible for working with the Blesma Support Officers to process grants for Members, ensuring they meet the criteria and the correct process has been followed to ensure grants are processed as soon as possible.

The other part of my role is to work with and support the Outreach Officers across the country by ensuring they have everything they need to be able to carry out their role, that the correct process has been followed, and collect information from the Outreach Officers to help plan for future activities.

How have you settled into Blesma?

Having worked for several other charities, and more recently in the NHS, it has been great to re-join the charity sector with Blesma, which gives such amazing support to its Members. Everyone has made me feel so welcome that I feel like I've been here forever!

Starting a new job can be daunting, but having the chance to spend some time with colleagues across all of the teams to learn how their roles fit in with mine has really helped me settle in and



learn what Blesma does. I was also lucky enough to attend Members' Weekend in October which was a great opportunity to meet with the Support and Outreach Officers, as well as some of the Members.

The weekend was informative and inspiring, and it was lovely to meet everyone. I have been made to feel so welcome by everyone at Blesma and a special thanks must go to my lovely colleagues in the Independence and Wellbeing Team and the Office and Facilities Team for their support.

Tell us a bit about yourself...

I have many years of experience working within the public sector for local government and schools

as a business manager, and within several charities carrying out various roles including grants processing, fundraising, marketing and charity governance.

I love entertaining at home and meeting with friends and colleagues for lunch, but I am a terrible cook – although I can bake cakes! I am always on the go and looking for the next project, which is usually some sort of arts and crafts or embroidery project, and I love to sing.

Before Covid, I used to sing for a community choir so I hope to get back to that soon. I am very much a 'people person' and I get a great sense of satisfaction knowing that something I have done, no matter how small, has made a difference to someone.



ALANA WARWICK CORPORATE FUNDRAISING OFFICER

Tell us about your role...

Corporate fundraising has been really affected by the Covid pandemic, so my immediate task is to develop a pipeline of businesses that want to work with Blesma in 2022 and beyond. Corporate fundraisers can support the charity in a number of different ways. They can simply fundraise: their employees could hold cake sales and participate in challenges, for example; or they may have scope to donate an amount to Blesma from the sale of their products and services or by sponsoring one of our events. However, these relationships can be transformational, companies can volunteer their time and expertise working collaboratively to solve problems or to enhance services. So when new businesses come on board, my role is to put together partnership plans and nurture the relationships so they are successful.

How have you settled into Blesma?

The team at Blesma have been so welcoming and as an ex-Army wife, and having worked for another military charity, I feel comfortable and ready to get on with the job at hand.

Tell us something about yourself...

Though I work full-time I am also a part-time student, working towards a diploma in psychodynamic counselling. The skills that I have been learning are easily transferable to the office and can enhance the relationships that I manage.



ABIOLA NAZARETE DATABASE OFFICER

Tell us about your role...

My role is multi-faceted; from the Members' database to the fundraising database and helping the staff to use them correctly. This role demands handling sensitive information, hence GDPR is a crucial part of the role. This role is layered to work across various Blesma teams.

Have you settled into Blesma?

Settling into a new job with a new team is certainly not an overnight process. It's only been a month, but everyone at Blesma has been very supportive in making me feel comfortable. The energy at Blesma is very refreshing and caring. I am settling in quite well and enjoying it. All I can say is I have been handled with care!

Tell us something about yourself...

I started my career working in advisory and consulting for a 'Big 4'. I took a sabbatical seven years ago to move into the charity sector. Over the years, I have worked in fundraising, supporting young adults in need at NCYPE. In my last role at the Freemasons Grand Charity I worked on the development of a data capture and processing solution for an online fundraising platform for more than 5,000 clients. And now, here I am at Blesma, where my manager likes to describe me as the last jigsaw piece of the database team.

Branch updates from across the Association

NOTTINGHAM BRANCH

As with all Branches over the last 18 months, most of our meetings and social functions have had to have been cancelled. However, we did manage to hold our Branch AGM in April, where it was great to see a few of the Members' faces again, even if it was via a webcam!

Our Branch Welfare Officer Jayne Waring has remained busy throughout the pandemic with regular phone calls to members. We were grateful to finally get some meetings and lunches up and running again in July.

The Branch normally holds six lunches a year at The Vale Hotel, Daybrook, Nottingham. If you would like to join us, it would be great to see new faces and you would be made very welcome.

We are also looking forward to holding our Branch Christmas lunch on Tuesday 14 December at the DoubleTree by Hilton Nottingham – Gateway.

David Ledger, Honorary Secretary

SOUTHAMPTON, WINCHESTER AND DISTRICT BRANCH

We hope you are all keeping well. All through Covid, the committee has kept in touch with members of the Branch by email or phone call, and is still doing so. This has enabled us to give assistance to members whenever our help has been needed.



Since June, when the lockdown was lifted, we have had two outings on the *Alison Macgregor*, a boat for disabled people, out of Hythe Marina. The trips were enjoyed by all who went thanks to Solent Dolphin. We had a Branch meeting at the Totton Community Centre, the first since lockdown was imposed. This was a chance to catch up, it took in two AGMs, and was much appreciated by all who attended.

A late summer lunch was organised by Caroline Pedrick. The guests included the Mayor of Winchester Vivian Achwal and her husband, along with Blesma Support Officer Pat, and Outreach Officer Andy, who all enjoyed the lunch.

We would like to wish the staff at Headquarters and all Blesma Members a merry Christmas and a better new year.

Dave Rowe, Chairman

SUTTON AND MERTON BRANCH

Sutton and Merton Branch has continued to function through the difficult Covid times thanks mainly to our dedicated chair, Annie. Hopes of resuming meetings in August were dashed when staff at Morden Brook contracted the virus.

The only Branch news to report is the sad death of our matriarch, Gwen Watts – truly the end of an era. Gwen was born on 01 November 1925 and grew up two doors away from her future



Southampton, Winchester and District Branch enjoy a day out

husband, Ron. The childhood sweethearts were separated when Ron went away to war. He returned home after having had his leg amputated, and on 27 September 1950 Miss Gwen Woodley became Mrs Gwen Watts.

From that time on they were inseparable. They attended Branch meetings together and Gwen supported Ron when he became our Branch Chairman. At Branch functions she organised the refreshments and spent most of the time behind the buffet tables.

In 2004, in recognition of her unstinting support of the Branch for more than 25 years, the Mayor of Merton presented Gwen with a certificate conferring on her the title: 'True Friend of Sutton and

Merton Branch'. It was a very sad day on 12 June 2016 when Ron died, just a couple of days after being told he was terminally ill. Our Treasurer, Dore died suddenly on the same day in the same hospital. Retired General Secretary, Jerome Church, died a few hours later.

Despite being 90 years of age, Gwen continued to attend Branch meetings with the assistance of our Branch Welfare Officer Gam, and agreed to be a committee member.

A year after Ron's death, Gwen was told that Lest We Forget didn't provide Wimbledon tickets to widows. She had always enjoyed accompanying Ron and mentioned her disappointment to our then-BSO, Paul Findlay. The ever-

resourceful young man promptly resolved the problem by obtaining tickets for himself and Gwen. She thoroughly enjoyed watching her favourite player, Roger Federer, win his match.

Gwen attended the Branch Christmas lunch in December 2019. At the age of 94, she finally conceded that she was no longer safe living alone and that it was time to go into a care home. Our chairman, Annie, kept in regular contact with her through those difficult Covid days when visitors were not allowed.

Gwen died aged 95 following a heart attack on Friday 13 August. Rest in peace Gwen.

We are hopeful that meetings will resume in the very near future. In the meantime, we hope everyone manages to stay safe.

*Patricia Robinson
Retired Honorary Secretary*

GREAT YARMOUTH AND LOWESTOFT BRANCH

Welcome to the Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft Branch winter update. We hope everyone is keeping safe and well as we head into the festive season.

The Branch celebrated its 75th anniversary on 19 August and we were delighted to see Branch members again after such a long time. We are grateful for the support of Blesma HQ and were delighted to see Chief Executive

Jon Bryant join us, along with our BSO Kevin Long and guests from the Great Yarmouth Lions and Norfolk Broads Lions. Members were able to share memories and photographs of past Branch gatherings followed by a Covid-safe 'sing-a-long', raffle and bingo.

A number of Members attended the fabulous Thursford Christmas Spectacular event on the evening of 02 November, an annual cabaret-style event which gets everyone into a festive mood. A great time was had by all – even if the event was a year later than planned!

At the time of writing, the Branch was planning to hold its Christmas lunch on Tuesday 07 December (in a Covid-safe environment) and was looking forward to welcoming Branch members old and new.

Branch members continue to get in touch with members of the Committee if they have any problems and we do our best to support them. If anyone is interested in joining any Branch events, please contact the chairman, Philip Monkhouse, on 07951 292681.

We would like to take this opportunity to send season's greetings to all our Branch members and the wider Blesma family, and wish everyone a safe winter season.

AUTUMN LETTER FROM BOURNEMOUTH BRANCH 1946 – 2021

We found out recently that our Branch has existed since October 1946. Its founder and first chairman was Archie Miles, then resident at the Bournemouth War Memorial Homes (WMH). The Homes were built by the residents of the Borough of Bournemouth on land donated by the Cooper Dean Estates.

Many local building firms contributed in cash or kind, and military charities including Blesma were also involved. In my many years as Branch Welfare Officer, I have had the privilege of visiting many Blesma residents there over the years. We currently have five residents living there, one for well over 50 years.

We, the Branch, have a very good relationship with WMH, as they are now known. We hold our meetings there and join in with the Remembrance Service (it was held outside this year on Armistice Day and kept to a bare minimum due to Covid). Hopefully, next year it will be back to normal.

Last year, all the front green was replanted, as were many trees. The Branch held a raffle which included a signed AFC Bournemouth football shirt. Our tree is always our centre of remembrance and is always planted with poppy crosses at this time of year.

Covid has produced one new blessing: the meeting room had an added conservatory and was unbearably hot, so during lockdown the whole thing was remodelled and extended upwards. It is now a large, airy room with a shared garden and new offices upstairs. The old office is now to become two new flats.

One of the sad duties of Branch Welfare is to attend the funerals of passing members. Recently, I attended the funeral of a widow. The celebrant was a very elderly clergyman, who turned out to have been the Branch chaplain back in the early days.

The lady had been a nurse in London and met her husband, a double above-knee amputee from The Tank Regiment (Palestine). He died before I joined, but we have had the blessing of her company for many years, and it was the Padre who reminded us all of the place our partners play in our daily lives; the unsung heroes and heroines of Blesma. They are always there in the background, getting on with whatever we need, understanding how difficult it can be to live with amputation.

At the time of writing, the Christmas lunch was due to be held at the Hotel Miramar East Cliff Bournemouth on 13 December.

PETER SHERSTON-BAKER



Jayne and Richard Waring, were presented with the 2019 Cyril Stephens Award during the visit

Midlands; and a few other members from across the Midlands. This was Jon's first and, sadly, last visit to the Walsall Branch, Covid restrictions having made travel and visits difficult prior to this. We are sure he will return to the NMA from time to time though as it is now quite a hub for veterans and their activities.

After Jon and Ian had taken the opportunity to meet the majority of members present most went into the Chapel for the introductory talk and service, after which we split into two groups. Mike Gallagher, the Chief Executive, and some members took the slow train around the NMA to look at the various plots and monuments, whilst the Walsall group gathered in a meeting room, with Ian Harper in attendance, for the Branch's closure meeting: a sad and quite emotional affair.

Tony Lloyd, Branch Chairman for many years, looked back on his time in the Branch and at some of the characters who had been particularly influential when he first joined. The late Tom Penny MBE featured highly in this, and Tony had learned a great deal from him. Others, like the late Bill Bradshaw, had been incredibly helpful in visiting members and identifying welfare needs.

Martin Kettrick, with his usual efficiency and energy, had wrapped up the Branch financial matters

A FAREWELL TO WALSALL BRANCH

There is an old saying: 'Time and tide waits for no man' and this has proved very true for the Walsall Branch. The age of our Members, the deteriorating health of many, and the ever-declining number of those able to attend meetings or get involved with helping to run the Branch have finally brought about its closure after a long run.

The Branch has a history: a number of Branch closures in the West Midlands saw the Walsall Branch grow and benefit as members from the old Shrewsbury (Shropshire) and Wolverhampton

(historically part of Staffordshire) Branches decided to transfer to the Walsall Branch. This resulted in the Branch covering an area from the Welsh Marches, right across the Black Country and beyond: a real mix of dialects but all speaking the same language – that of Blesma.

On Monday 11 October a small group of Walsall Branch members gathered at the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) for a visit and lunch organised by Ness, the Midlands Outreach Officer. Also present were: Jon Bryant, Chief Executive of Blesma; Ian Harper, the Director Independence and Wellbeing; Sam Wileman, BSO



and handed all funds over to Headquarters, so little time was spent on this, leaving Branch President, Jim Keating, to say thank you to everyone who had assisted the Branch over the years.

This included thanks to Tony, of course, and to Mike Gallagher, who had filled several Branch posts and been our middleman with the NMA. Gerry Crossland was thanked for his sterling welfare work, and Pat Whittaker, the Vice Chairman and previous Honorary Treasurer, for her great support and sense of fun. There was thanks too for all those like Mal James and Diane and Stephen Parslow, who had done more than their bit for the Branch and for Blesma, and to the wives and widows, the unsung heroes who had given their support to the Branch.

For the last few years, because of the wide geographical spread of members, the Branch has had some tremendous support from



two BSOs; Sam Wileman and Tom Hall, and their two hardworking Outreach Officers; Ness and Jason. Thank you guys, you have been great! We were heartened to learn from Sam and Ness that, from time to time, we will be gathering at The Shropshire for a social light lunch (with chips, of course!) where we will be able to catch up with all the latest news and gossip. After a pleasant lunch, Jon took

the opportunity to let us all know that he and his staff will continue to provide the help and support Blesma Members need, and will take the Association forward in a good and positive way.

It's going well so far Jon, so thank you to all at Headquarters for your continuing help. And on that note it's goodbye from me and goodbye from the Walsall Branch.
Jim Keating OBE

Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care

Welcome to the Bulletin's regular section on the benefits system. As well as highlighting useful information regarding the benefits system, on occasions we will be raising awareness of some health and social care matters. If you would like to discuss your benefit entitlement or have a social care query, please contact your Blesma Support Officer (contact details can be found on p38). Alternatively, you can contact Liz Watling in the Independence and Wellbeing team by email at iwabenefits@blesma.org or by calling her on 020 8548 7080.

HELP WITH HEATING COSTS

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

WINTER FUEL PAYMENT

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

- You were born on or before 26 September 1955
- You have lived in the UK for at least one day during the week of 20-26 September 2021 (known as the 'qualifying week')

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

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

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

- You are in hospital getting free treatment for more than a year
- You lived in a care home for the whole time between 28 June and 26 September 2021, and received Pension Credit, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, or income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- You were in prison for the whole week between 20-26 September 2021
- You need permission to enter the UK and your granted leave states that you cannot claim public funds

HOW TO CLAIM

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

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

You will receive a letter about three weeks before your payment. These letters were sent between mid-October and November. Your bank statement showing the payment will have the reference: 'DWP Winter Fuel'. Most payments are made automatically in November or December, and you should get your money by 14 January 2022.

If you are not entitled to an automatic payment but still meet the criteria, you must make a claim. For a claim form, call 0800 731 0160. The form must be received by the Winter Fuel Payment Centre by 31 March 2022. If you are entitled to a Winter Fuel Payment and your only government-paid income

Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care continued

is from a War Pension or War Widows Pension, your Winter Fuel Payment will be processed by Veterans UK.

For any queries please call the Winter Fuel Payment Centre on 0800 731 0160

WARM HOME DISCOUNT SCHEME

(ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES)

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

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

HOW TO CLAIM:

CORE GROUP

You qualify for the discount if, on 04 July 2021, all of the following applied:

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

If you qualify for the core group, you should receive a letter between October and December 2021 telling you how to get the discount. Your letter will inform you as to whether you need to call a helpline by 28 February 2022 to confirm your details. Your electricity supplier will apply your discount to your bill by 31 March 2022. If you are eligible for the core group and do not receive a letter, contact the Warm Home Discount Team on 0800 731 0214.

BROADER GROUP

You may be able to apply directly to your electricity supplier for help if you do not qualify under the core

group rules. You may qualify if, on 04 July 2021, all of the following applied:

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

Your electricity supplier decides its own criteria for the scheme. Do not contact the Warm Home Discount Scheme. Check with your supplier to see if it is part of the scheme, if you are eligible, and how to apply. If entitled, your electricity supplier will apply your discount to your bill by 31 March 2022.

PARK (MOBILE) HOMES

You apply in a different way if you live in a park home. The scheme is available for permanent residents living in a park home in England, Scotland or Wales who pay their electricity bills directly to their park site owner. Park home applications open in the autumn and there is a restriction on numbers who can receive a payment. Applications are considered on a first-come, first-served basis. The Park Homes Warm Home Discount Scheme for 2021/22 is now closed as it has reached the maximum number of applications.

Subject to Ofgem guidance, it is anticipated the Park Homes Warm Home Discount Scheme will open again in September 2022. The fund is administered by Charis Grants. To register your interest for 2022 you can leave your details at www.parkhomeswhd.com You will then be contacted when the scheme opens in 2022 to see if you would like to make an application.

Charis Grants can only answer questions about the Park Homes Warm Home Discount Scheme. The scheme is not available in Northern Ireland, but there is the Affordable Warmth Scheme which aims to address the effects of fuel poverty and energy inefficiency. The scheme is directed at low income households, and you should contact your local council to see if you qualify for help.

COLD WEATHER PAYMENT

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

Pension Credit

- Income Support or income-based Job Seeker’s Allowance and you have either:
 - A disability or pensioner premium
 - A disabled child
- Child Tax Credit that includes a disability or severe disability element
- A child under five living with you

Income-related Employment and Support Allowance

and you are in either the work related activity group or support group. If you are not in either group, you may get a payment if you have either:

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

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

Universal Credit

The temporary increase of £20 per week for Universal Credit standard allowances ended in October. This increase was put in place by the Government as a temporary measure to support those on the lowest incomes at the start of the pandemic. If you are a claimant of Universal Credit you should have received updated information to your journal advising of the date of change for your claim, and you are also provided with a link which signposts you to advice and support for managing your money.

Post Office Card Accounts

In recent issues of *The Bulletin*, we have advised of Post Office Card Accounts that were due to end in November 2021. The Government has now extended the closure for a further year – until November 2022. This is in order to allow time to safely move existing users over to traditional bank accounts or a new Payment Exception Service.

The Department for Work and Pensions is writing to all customers who currently receive payment into a Post Office Card Account telling them the service is ending and encouraging those who are able to open a bank account to do so.

Those who remain unable to access such services will be migrated onto a new Payment Exception Service, which will allow them to choose how they receive their payments.

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 | Steven Burrell | 020 7501 3030 07469 242277 | bsolse@blesma.org |
| BSO Midlands | Sam Wileman | 020 8548 7095 07825 536363 | bsomid@blesma.org |
| BSO North East | Christine Landess | 020 3954 3027 07917 972825 | bsone@blesma.org |
| BSO North West | Mike Downes | 01257 795144 07825 536362 | bsonw@blesma.org |
| BSO Scotland, NI & ROI | Steve Burton | 07766 258461 | bsosniroi@blesma.org |
| BSO South | Pat Donnachie | 020 3954 3026 07741 846106 | bsosouth@blesma.org |
| BSO South West | Steve Fraser | 01278 789393 07788 312747 | bsosw@blesma.org |
| BSO West | Tom Hall | 020 8548 7098 07780 165085 | bsowest@blesma.org |
| Members Living Overseas | Liz Watling | 020 8548 7080 | iwabenefits@blesma.org |
| BLESMA OUTREACH OFFICERS | | | |
| Outreach Officer Eastern | Darren Fuller | 07741 661159 | outreacheastern@blesma.org |
| Outreach Officer London & South East | Jess Linge | 07741 845793 | outreachlse@blesma.org |
| Outreach Officer Midlands | Vanessa Lucas | 07741 845429 | outreachmid@blesma.org |
| Outreach Officer Northern Ireland | Fiona Morrison | 07741 744617 | outreachni@blesma.org |
| Outreach Officer North East | Adele Miller | 07741 847211 | outreachne@blesma.org |
| Outreach Officer North West | Kirsten Morrissey | 07741 846674 | outreachnw@blesma.org |
| Outreach Officer Scotland | Emma Gratton | 07884 695703 | outreachscotland@blesma.org |
| Outreach Officer South | Andy Barlow | 07384 834449 | outreachsouth@blesma.org |
| Outreach Officer South West | Sarah Payne | 07741 737563 | outreachsw@blesma.org |
| Outreach Officer West | Jason Suller | 07741 744141 | outreachwest@blesma.org |

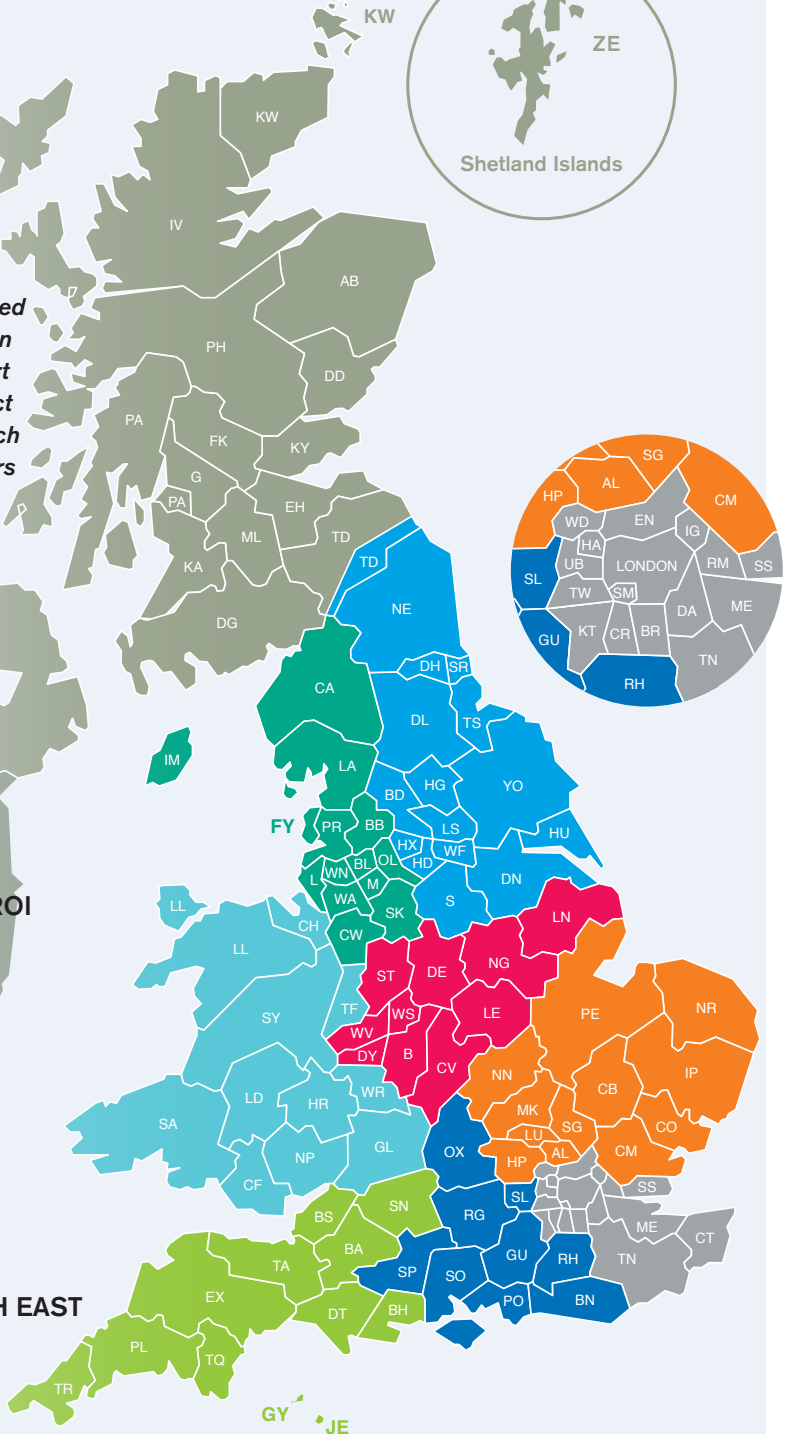
| TITLE | NAME | TELEPHONE | EMAIL |
|--|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| INDEPENDENCE AND WELLBEING | | | |
| Benefits and Social Care Advisor | Liz Watling | 020 8548 7080 | iwabenefits@blesma.org |
| Grants and Outreach Activities Executive | Jackie King | 020 8548 3516 | goaexec@blesma.org |
| Membership, Branch and Volunteer Network Executive | Debbie Mayne | 020 8548 7093 | mbvexec@blesma.org |
| Grants Admin | Susie Grainger | 020 3954 3022 | grantsadmin@blesma.org |
| Welfare – Direct Line | | 020 8598 9459 | |
| ACTIVITIES | | | |
| Activities Manager | Jess March | 020 8548 3519 | activities@blesma.org |
| Membership Engagement Officer | Emily Mizon | 020 8548 7094 | meo@blesma.org |
| Activities Executive | Clare Wellings | 020 3954 3021 | ae@blesma.org |
| Activities Executive (Local) | Nicole Findlay | 020 8548 7097 | aelocal@blesma.org |
| FUNDRAISING | | | |
| Head of Fundraising | Anna Scalera | 020 8548 3517 | hf@blesma.org |
| Senior Community and Events Officer | Abbie-Louise Mills | 020 8548 7089 | communityeventsofficersnr@blesma.org |
| Corporate and Regional Fundraising Manager | Chris Knight | 07774 797318 | crfm@blesma.org |
| Senior Corporate Fundraising Officer | Alana Warwick | 020 8590 1124 | scfo@blesma.org |
| Database Manager | Julie Hitchcock | 020 8548 7088 | dbmanager@blesma.org |
| COMMUNICATIONS | | | |
| Stories, Content and Press Officer | Jess Mackinnon | 020 8548 3514 | storiesandpress@blesma.org |
| Digital Media Manager | Nick Tuck | 01299 896282 | digitalmedia@blesma.org |
| Communications Executive | Izzy Perks | 020 8548 7092 | commsexec@blesma.org |
| DIRECTORS | | | |
| Chief Executive | Jon Bryant | 020 8548 3512 | ce@blesma.org |
| Operations Director | Tony Bloomfield | 020 8548 3513 | od@blesma.org |
| Director Independence and Wellbeing | Ian Harper | 020 8548 3515 | diw@blesma.org |
| USEFUL CONTACTS | | | |
| Main Office | | 020 8590 1124 | info@blesma.org |
| HR and Facilities Manager | Martin Gwillim | 020 8548 3511 | hrf@blesma.org |
| IT and Admin Support Officer | Ivona Andrejsova | 020 8548 7091 | itas@blesma.org |

Blesma by area

Have you got a question or need advice? Don't hesitate to get in touch with the Blesma Support Officer in your area. The contact numbers for all BSOs, Outreach Officers, and relevant members of staff can be found on p38.



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



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