

# Blesma

Bulletin Members' Newsletter Summer 2017



## Stronger than ever before

The 2016 Annual Report shows the Association is in very good health



### How to put the 'fun' into fundraising

From Blesma Week to racing ducks, the Association has been very busy **p24**



### Fancy giving something new a go?

Try one of Blesma's bespoke activities and give yourself a new lease of life **p22**



### Ask not what Blesma can do for you...

The Association's volunteers help in all sorts of ways. Want to join in? **p17**

**Inside: The Blesma Awards 2016 winners**

A mountain biker is riding a trail through a forest. The rider is wearing a black helmet, a white and black jersey with red accents, black shorts, and white gloves. The bike is a full-suspension mountain bike with knobby tires. The trail is narrow and surrounded by tall trees and dense foliage. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day. The text is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

**Hit the trails with  
Simon Taylor in the Autumn  
issue of Blesma Magazine**

**Available in October**

# Blesma Bulletin

## Summer 2017



The highly successful Members' Weekend 2017 took place in June, and we are already planning for the 2018 Weekend. We'll get the details to you in the Autumn Bulletin. We held the AGM during

that Weekend, so it was a full couple of days.

The Trustees also used the opportunity to hold a quarterly meeting, and decided to invest in an extra Support Officer for the centre of England. Heather Nicholson will release the full plan in due course but, in essence, the current two regions of Eastern and Midlands will become three: Eastern, Midlands and West, each with their own Support Officer. This also ties in with the emphasis on more assistance to the most infirm and those in later life, in their own homes and communities. The Support Officers are on the front line, so an extra pair of hands will reap benefits for the membership.

As you may be aware, Charley Streater BSO (Midlands) has left Blesma, having retired on the grounds of ill health. Charley made a huge difference to the lives of Members and Widows in his area, and will be very much missed. We thank him for all he has done and wish him all the very best for the future.

The Activities Programme is pushing ahead but we would like to see the interest shown turn into a wider attendance. Members seem keen to participate but don't quite get there. The feedback is that Members need a little more encouragement and peer support to remove any doubts they may have as the events get closer. Comments from those who do attend are highly positive and we would like more people to

have the same experience. Members spreading the word on the worth of the Programme from their own perspective would help greatly.

There is some really important information in the Benefits Spotlight on p34, especially on the disregard of War Pension for care assessment. Liz Watling is keeping a close watch on the state of benefits, and social care is now high on the political agenda as a result of the General Election; we expect to be consulted. We are also keen to see how the refreshed NHS England mental health provision for veterans performs this year. There needs to be improvement.

To end, I return to the Annual General Meeting and the Report made by the Trustees. A summary is included in this Bulletin. If you wish to have your own full copy, please contact Sue Stokes at Chadwell Heath and she will send you one. The full report can also be found on the Blesma website ([www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org)).

In short, Blesma is in a good position, well able to carry on doing what it does best, and we can afford to do it better whenever the need arises.

**Barry Le Grys, Chief Executive**

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# Annual Report 2016: In Summary

## SECURITY

Our eight 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 to amputees.

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 new amputees in Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham and visit Members undergoing rehabilitation and/or transition to civilian life.

Blesma also holds a 'clinic' at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre, Headley Court. The Director of Membership Services, working closely with the Chief Executive, decides how welfare grants are distributed and to whom, following guidance from Trustees and long-standing practice. In 2016, the Blesma Membership Services team:

- Made 1,609 home visits and 158 other visits
- Made 1,176 individual grants to 757 recipients

In 2016, we continued to observe and monitor developments in prosthetics provision to our Members across the UK. By working at an individual level, advocating for those Members who require support locally as well as campaigning for changes nationally, improvements have been made. For those with Service-attributable amputations, the Veterans Prosthetic Panel continues to provide an excellent process for funding components in England. Eligible Members in the devolved administrations have similar access to state-of-the-art prosthetics via slightly differing mechanisms.

Significantly, Blesma has been instrumental in the development of the Complex Prosthetics Clinic at Headley Court for those veterans who may be referred back to the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre Headley Court from the NHS for the management of complex prosthetic issues.

We have also played a significant role in the Veterans Trauma Network in England, which provides access to a regional network of 10 NHS Veterans Trauma Centres where NHS and military experts in trauma can provide targeted clinical plans to a cohort of patients who have struggled with the existing system, particularly those with complex injuries suffered in blasts from IEDs which require multiple operations and expert care after they have left service, but many reported fragmented delivery and delays. This support could be life-changing for those Members who are eligible for this treatment.

Residency at The Elizabeth Frankland



Moore Home continued to fall, as anticipated, in 2016. The demand from the membership has been shifting from residential care at a single Blesma Home to care assistance in Members' own homes for some time. The Trustees decided that the moment had come to move resources from the single Blesma Home to supporting the wider membership in their own communities. Blesma remains committed to through-life support and this is now delivered in a different way, on a more individual basis. In 2016, the Home cared for 18 residents and 192 visitors. It was closed before the end of the year and sold in 2017.

## IDENTITY

Our programme of ambitious, challenging and enjoyable activities plays an essential role in helping Members to improve their physical and mental wellbeing. Activities promote confidence and self-belief, and provide a social hub where Members interact and expand personal horizons. In a sense, they replace the old Branch structure that did so much for earlier generations of Members.

A major achievement for those who participate in our robust activities is social interaction; the camaraderie that is part of any Blesma activity, which shows that pain and discomfort are not unique but problems that can be shared and, in a sense, alleviated.

We followed up on last year's pilot study by St Mary's University, Twickenham which found 'Members experienced a feeling of accomplishment, enhanced subjective wellbeing, and a sense of belonging following the event' by carrying out a Members' survey to enable us to get more in-depth feedback on the whole Activities Programme.

Many Members described the activities as 'life changing' and told us that they would like more activities to involve their families because they too are affected by the impact of learning to live with limb loss. In response

to this feedback, we have included more activities for families in the 2017 programme, and are progressing well with our research into the impact of traumatic amputation on the family, which is backed by the Forces in Mind Trust and The National Lottery.

The activities on offer ranged from cycling and horse riding to fishing and adaptive Winter sports; all arranged within a social framework. Our pervading ethos of Member supporting Member is central to the Programme, supplemented by Blesma staff and volunteers.

Photography retains its position as perhaps the most popular activity amongst Members of all ages and abilities. Digital photography courses in subjects from basic instruction to wildlife photography in Mull, and to studio work and urban photography in London were enjoyed by Members with different levels of mobility. Local photography events run by Members also proved highly popular, attracting new participants who wanted to improve their skills.

**In 2016, Blesma delivered:**

- **42 activities in 22 categories**
- **to 312 participants, 84 of whom were new to the Programme**
- **1,905 Member days in all**
- **19 activities led by Members**
- **8 Paralympic contenders supported**

The release of the Blesma Home provided us with an opportunity to seek out new venues for a range of activities in the latter half of 2016, including our popular weeks for Blesma Widows and those who are less mobile through age or disability. Other highlights of the Programme included:

- **The first horse riding activity in Arizona**
- **The first Blesma adaptive ski activity with Disabled Sports (UK)**
- **Family glamping trip**

- **Adaptive skiing in Sölden, Austria – our 31st year**
- **Blesma Golf – and working with the On Course Foundation at home and abroad**
- **Increasingly popular competitive cycling events and ‘recreational’ rides in the USA, Europe and the UK, including the Belgium Battlefield Ride to commemorate the Centenary of the Battle of the Somme**
- **Winter Wilderness Expedition in Colorado**
- **Sub-aqua in the Maldives**
- **The Hartford Ski Spectacular at Breckenridge Rocky Mountains**
- **SRUK – a UK version of the US SoldierRide (run by our friends The Wounded Warrior Project ((WWP)) in the USA) – was a special ‘hands across the sea’ cycling event sponsored by Blesma and The WWP. The Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire started the ride, which finished six days later in Richmond Park, London.**

## 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.

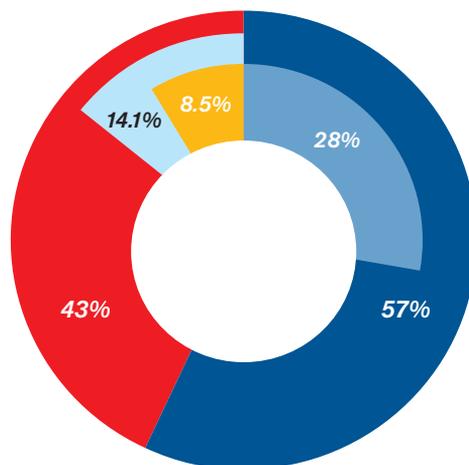
Recent conflict has seen the need for modern advocacy, which has led to better compensation, better after care for the injured, and better prosthetic support for amputees. Expertise is growing within the NHS in prosthetic limb and socket technology due, in large part, to the number of amputee veterans being treated by the NHS. This has taken time to develop and will grow further.

2016 saw the Murrison initiative maintain its momentum within NHS England and its Veterans Prosthetic Panel, including Blesma, has been most effective, displaying much flexibility. 328 veterans’ prescriptions were upgraded by the Panel in 2016, at a cost of £1.4 million. A number of upgrades were

## THE AGE OF BLESMA'S MEMBERS (excl. Widows)

■ Members under 65 years of age	57%
■ Members over 65 years of age	43%
■ Members under 45 years of age	28%
■ Members over 80 years of age	14.1%
■ Members over 90 years of age	8.5%

(35.5% of all UK veterans are under 65 years of age; RBL Household Survey)



received by veterans aged over 60, the eldest being 86. Blesma worked with NHS England as a member of the Prosthetic Sub Group to the Clinical Reference Group for Complex Disability Equipment to persuade the NHS to provide a 'microprocessor controlled prosthetic knee' for lower limb amputees.

This policy has been upwards of three years in preparation (suffering numerous setbacks and delays) and was finally introduced in December 2016. The aim is to give people the best mobility and function possible, and this should improve long-term health and quality of life for those who meet the clinical criteria, including Associate Members of Blesma.

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 provides not only an excellent learning opportunity for GPs about health needs for veterans, but also introduces them to some of the many Service organisations that can help.

Equity is a most important principle in supporting those who have lost limbs in the service of our country, whether recently or long ago, and we will continue to campaign

to address any inequities. We are pursuing one of the concerns that lingers within the venerable War Disablement Pension and the inequities that become apparent when viewed alongside more modern compensation arrangements. We continue our work with officials in the DoH/NHS to ensure our Members who have lost the use of limbs, and are therefore permanent wheelchair users, continue to be provided with advanced mobility aids when they become veterans and are no longer eligible for wheelchair provision provided by Headley Court through the Veterans Mobility Fund. Orthotics are also provided by this Fund.

Above all, it is the achievements of our Members that truly represent what we, as a very special Association, stand for. Our Members continue to undertake physical challenges of epic proportions, cycling thousands of miles, climbing the world's highest peaks, racing down mountains in world class Winter sports events, and scuba diving over wrecks and reefs.

Members undertake artistic challenges too, including published creative writing, painting, photography, appearing on the professional stage and in films and dancing,

and winning in televised competitions. All with the aim of living a life fulfilled and proving there is life after limb loss. Such achievement comes from within the human spirit but also from the inspiration of what fellow Members do – an achievement which is repeated year after year.

The Blesma Community Programme trains Blesma Members professionally to tell their stories of trauma and recovery to youths, and to facilitate workshops on the themes of resilience and overcoming challenges. The Programme exceeded all targets to train 15 Members who then addressed 2,870 youths, many of whom had special education needs.

Amongst our wider target audience – the 6.2 million of the ex-Service community – the Blesma brand is becoming increasingly recognisable and understood. On a national level, this awareness of what Blesma does and stands for has resulted in increased demand for our contribution on influential TV and radio programmes. *Blesma Magazine*, with more than 35,000 readers, and our redeveloped website with 106,000 annual visitors, remain central to communications and fundraising efforts.

Website traffic has increased by 41% in the past 12 months as tablet and smartphone versions of [www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org) have allowed improved viewing and interactivity. Social media has grown significantly in importance within both the Association and amongst supporters. Facebook reached 8.4 million readers, with one million people a month seeing our posts. Importantly, a small number of Members in difficulty were picked up and supported as a result of Facebook interaction amongst our 20,000 followers.

Our Twitter account has 14,000 followers, up 51% on the previous year, and our presence on Instagram and LinkedIn is growing, too. The ability to tell Members' stories through appropriate channels continues to enhance

Blesma's ability to assist its people to lead independent and fulfilling lives.

Sadly, our National President, Gerald Cavendish Grosvenor, 6th Duke of Westminster, passed away in 2016. His Grace had been President since 1992 and was Patron of the Chester Branch before then. Always interested and active in Blesma affairs, and a great supporter, he will be much missed.

## RESOURCING

Investment in fundraising decreased to 14.6% of all expenditure in 2016 (18.6% in 2015), whilst donations were 31% of all income (35% in 2015). If legacy income is included, 84% of all income came through fundraising. Blesma fundraising performed significantly well against an increasingly difficult fundraising landscape for Armed Forces charities post Afghanistan and a sceptical public following adverse publicity of unethical fundraising methods. Blesma gathered 1,859 new supporters in the year, the majority through in-house Direct Mail campaigns.

Exemplary fundraising standards remained a constant in all our activity and although there is more to come in 2017 from the new Fundraising Regulator, Blesma is confident, but not complacent, in our approach. Blesma paid its Levy to the Fundraising Regulator and is ensuring 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. Our own fundraising activities are monitored closely. Our fundraising ethics and promise, complaints and privacy policies are published. Our policy towards vulnerable people is adhered to in our fundraising activities. There were no formal complaints relating to fundraising in 2016.

# Blesma Community Programme 2016

Target

10

10 Members  
to reach 1,000  
youngsters

Actual

15

15 Members  
reached 2,870  
youngsters

The Blesma Community Programme gives limbless veterans the skills to share their stories with young people in a way that encourages resilience and the ability to overcome adversity

# Blesma Awards 2016



Andy Grant gets the Jack Trigg Memorial Award

## THE JACK TRIGG MEMORIAL AWARD

THE JACK TRIGG MEMORIAL AWARD FOR 2016 is awarded to Andy Grant. The citation reads as follows:

“This Award, which recognises personal endeavour or sporting agility, 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. This year, it is awarded to Andy Grant.

“Andy participated in the 2014 Invictus Games, winning gold medals in the 400m and 1,500m track events, and bronze in the 50m freestyle swimming. However, being a long distance runner, he wanted to test his performance over much longer distances and

he decided to set himself the goal of becoming the fastest single leg amputee over 10km.

“In 2016, after months of hard training, Andy beat the world record by an amazing 37 seconds. Andy faced huge obstacles to achieve his amazing ‘world first’. He has shown true grit and fighting spirit in achieving his record, and is truly deserving of the Jack Trigg Memorial Award.”

## THE HAMBRO AWARD

THE HAMBRO AWARD FOR 2016 HAS been awarded to the Blesma Community Programme. Chief Executive Barry Le Grys presented the award to Alex Krol at the Members’ Weekend. The citation reads:



Alex Krol receives the Hambro Award on behalf of the Blesma Community Programme

“This Award recognises high achievers who have displayed exceptional commitment and dedication in any field. 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.

“Last year, Blesma began working with theatre professionals to establish the Blesma Community Programme. This gives Members who have or who are overcoming the trauma of injury, the skills to share their stories with young people in schools, Pupil Referral Units and prisons in a way that encourages resilience and the ability to overcome adversity.

“Fifteen Blesma Members reached 2,870 youngsters. Feedback suggests the stories shared by Members inspired some of these young people to seek help and support when they otherwise would not have done so. We have trained a further 14 Members this year, with the aim of inspiring 4,000 more young

people in 2017. Our veterans have opened up about their darkest moments to help thousands of young people facing their own problems, and for that Blesma recognises their commitment by the presentation of the Hambro Award.”

### THE FRANKLAND MOORE TROPHY

THE FRANKLAND MOORE TROPHY FOR 2016 is awarded to Chris Jones. The Chief Executive presented the award to Chris at the Members’ Weekend. 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, our ‘Welfare Reps’, and this year is awarded to Chris Jones, Welfare Rep Gloucestershire. Chris served in the Royal Signals and became



Chris Jones receives the Frankland Moore trophy

a Blesma Member in 1966, following the amputation of his right leg above the knee.

“Since 2005, Chris has worked tirelessly for his fellow Members, putting their needs before his own, and this has been most apparent in the last 12 months. Chris has fought flooding in Gloucestershire to track down Members and even ferried equipment to and from Members and mobility shops. Some Members have required more support than others, none more so than an elderly female amputee who had a terrible time in 2016 and who would have been considerably worse off if it were not for Chris’ selfless and repeated contact and intervention.

“Chris epitomises the Blesma ethos of Member helping Member and is truly deserving of the Frankland Moore trophy.”

### THE CYRIL STEPHENS AWARD

THE CYRIL STEPHENS AWARD FOR 2016 is awarded to Brian and Sheila Woodhouse. Chief Executive Barry Le Grys

presented the award to Brian and Sheila at the Members’ Weekend. The citation reads as follows:

“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 until 1947, and National President from 1949 until his death in 1956. It recognises the work undertaken by Blesma supporters, and this year it is awarded to Brian and Sheila Woodhouse.

“Brian has been a Member of Blesma for 11 years, and the couple have been Blesma fundraisers for just over eight years. Brian and Sheila deploy their musical talents by holding concerts in local clubs, sheltered housing schemes, hospitals and residential homes and, to date, have held 96 events, raising nearly £6,000 for Blesma.

“It is only fitting that we recognise Brian and Sheila’s dedicated service to our charity by awarding them the Cyril Stephens Award.”

Brian and Sheila  
Woodhouse with the  
Cyril Stephens Award



## THE EARL OF ANCASTER MEMORIAL AWARD

THE EARL OF ANCASTER MEMORIAL Award for 2016 is awarded to Sue Wright. The citation reads as follows:

“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, and this year it is awarded to Sue Wright.

“Sue is an active Member of the Blesma Photography Group and has helped the group expand its work for the benefit of its Members. She set up the photography website and helps to organise trips and training courses. Her work has helped inspire Members of all ages and abilities to learn new skills whilst enjoying the fellowship of other Members.

“Sue has also generously given of her time to assist Blesma’s Digital Media Officer in

Sue Wright wins the  
Earl of Ancaster  
Memorial Award



developing Blesma’s website. It is fitting that we recognise Sue’s dedicated service to our charity and she is a most worthy recipient of the Earl of Ancaster Memorial Award.”

# Prosthetics Update

## MICROPROCESSOR CONTROLLED PROSTHETIC KNEES (MPK) – PRESCRIBING CRITERIA

Since the end of December 2016, NHS Limb Centres in England have been able to consider prescribing MPKs to those patients who fulfil the criteria of the MPK policy. This policy sets out a number of factors that the clinical team must consider before embarking on this course of action. Below is an extract of the policy which lists the factors in detail.

NOTE: This policy does not cover those veterans with a Service-attributable amputation as they will continue to access MPK via the Veterans Prosthetic Panel funding. Scotland and Northern Ireland have prescribing policies in place, whilst Wales is working towards an MPK policy.

### EXTRACT OF NHS(E) MPK POLICY (DATED 12 DECEMBER 2016)

In order to qualify for consideration for an MPK, the patient needs to:

- Meet at least one criteria in each of: 'Amputation Level', 'Activity Level' and 'Mobility Level'
- Meet all criteria in 'Patient Must Demonstrate'
- Have at least one of the indications in 'Indications'
- Have none of the contra-indications in 'Contra-indications'

### AMPUTATION LEVEL

- Unilateral trans-femoral
- Hip disarticulation

- Knee disarticulation
- Bilateral lower limb amputee with at least one trans-femoral amputation

### ACTIVITY LEVEL

K3, patient is able to walk with a free mechanical knee, and has the ability or potential for ambulation with variable cadence and traverse environmental barriers as a community ambulator

### MOBILITY LEVEL

SIGAM D or above. Able to walk more than 50 yards on level ground

### PATIENT MUST DEMONSTRATE

- Commitment to prosthetic rehabilitation through active participation with the therapy team
- Adequate strength and balance to be able to activate the knee unit. Requirement of the MPK to be the main day-to-day prosthesis, cognitive reasoning to master control; operation and care of the device. Sufficient cardiovascular abilities to meet the fitness demands of ambulating outdoors with a free knee

### PATIENTS MUST MEET ONE OF THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

To be considered for an MPK, the user should have a comfortable, well-fitting socket and be able to walk outdoors with a free knee. In this case, an MPK would be indicated:

- With a clinical presentation of unstable gait evidenced as history of frequent falls, stumbles



or near misses (e.g. due to contra-lateral limb impairment or amputation). A trial is required to prove reduced risk of falls

- When the risk of injury from a fall is very high due to a co-existing medical condition (e.g. upper limb joint replacements, inability to protect head in case of a fall due to upper limb impairment, increased risk of fracture). A trial is required to prove reduced risk of injury
- When the reduced energy requirements for walking would allow the user to improve mobility and environmental obstacle negotiation

### CONTRA-INDICATIONS

**(Editor's note: if you exhibit any of these you may not meet the criteria for MPKs)**

- Limited cognitive ability to understand operating and care requirements
- K4 activities (mainly activities that include running as most MPK manufacturers recommend against that), except when the manufacturer specifically states suitability for K4 activities as most manufacturers of MPKs would not recommend use for K4 activities
- Low activity level – amputee with no or limited ability or potential to ambulate on level ground at fixed cadence
- Patient's weight or height falls out of manufacturer's recommendations
- Water-related activities, unless the MPK manufacturer specifically states the MPK is waterproof
- Not enough space to fit the MPK (built on length available) or where cosmetic appearance will be an issue for the user
- Failure to achieve good socket fit or comfort
- Low mobility level (SIGAM A-C), which can't be improved through an MPK trial
- Patient not able to tolerate weight of unit
- Inability to regularly charge batteries
- Significant hip flexion contracture preventing correct knee alignment and MPK's activation as per manufacturer's recommendations. A hip fixed flexion of 30 or above is unlikely to be suitable for MPK prescription
- User's inability to commit to regular maintenance as recommended by manufacturer

Clinical teams must satisfy themselves that the relevant criteria are met before trialling MPKs with the patient and pre-authorisation for funding is required. The NHS England pre-authorisation process is computer software based and is not yet fully available to all Limb Centres. This is work in progress and Blesma is monitoring this closely.

If, having looked at these prescribing details, you feel that you may be eligible for an MPK, you should ask for an appointment with your Limb Centre clinical team. The full policy wording can be viewed online at [england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/clin-comm-pol-16061P.pdf](http://england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/clin-comm-pol-16061P.pdf)

*For further information and support, please contact your local BSO or BSO (Prosthetics). The relevant contact details can be found on page 29*

### VETERANS MOBILITY FUND UPDATE

The Ministry of Defence has put in place measures to ensure that a Service person discharged with Service-attributable serious physical injury will have any clinically prescribed specialist wheelchair or orthotic equipment by discharge date together with a five-year warranty.

The Veterans Mobility Fund (VMF), which is administered by The Royal British Legion, will support those veterans who have Service-related serious physical injury who fall outside this provision, or whose warranty has expired. Funding for this scheme is from LIBOR fines. To be eligible for the VMF,

an individual will normally be in receipt of a War Pension or have received an award under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme. If you have not applied for a War Pension or AFCS award, please speak to your local BSO for assistance in submitting your application.

There are two stages to the application process. The first stage assesses eligibility, which will require you to submit evidence of your War Pension or award under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme. The second stage will be completed and submitted by relevant clinical experts, such as an Occupational Therapist or Orthotist. To apply to the Veterans Mobility Fund, you should download and complete a VMF eligibility application form which is available via the RBL website ([britishlegion.org.uk](http://britishlegion.org.uk)). *To request a form to be sent to you by post, please call the Legion Contact Centre on 0808 802 8080 or email [medicalfunds@britishlegion.org.uk](mailto:medicalfunds@britishlegion.org.uk)*

Although the VMF is primarily aimed at supporting wheelchair and orthotic provision, other mobility aids may be considered for funding on a case-by-case basis. In the first instance, you should contact your BSO for advice and, if necessary, Blesma will liaise with the VMF on your behalf.

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*If you need advice or support in dealing with your Limb Centre, or if you have any questions relating to prosthetics, get in touch with BSO (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier at Chadwell Heath on 020 8548 7080 or by email at [bsoprosthetics@blesma.org](mailto:bsoprosthetics@blesma.org)*

# Why not volunteer and help the Association?

## WELFARE VOLUNTEERS – ‘WELFARE REPS’

One of the ways in which we can improve Blesma’s connectivity is by recruiting more volunteers who visit Members. These are better known as our ‘Welfare Reps’.

Over the years, we have been fortunate to benefit from the support of a willing band of Members and friends who work with the Blesma Support Officers, visiting Members in their homes or in hospital, having a chat over a cup of coffee and, when necessary, asking the BSO to follow up on issues that are affecting a Members’ health or wellbeing.

If you are interested in volunteering to help your fellow Members, please contact your BSO who will tell you more about the role and explain the Code of Conduct. The relevant contact details can be found on page 29.

## BRANCHES

At the vanguard of willing volunteers who support Blesma are those who run the Branches. Finding volunteers who are prepared to take on the commitment of being an office bearer remains the greatest challenge and, regrettably, Branches are unable to function without the positions of Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer.

Chadwell Heath is here to support Branches – by distributing newsletters or other correspondence, for example, or by providing grants to enable Members to get together for social events. *If you need any support, please contact the Membership Services Team on 020 8548 7093*



## CHADWELL HEATH (HQ) BRANCH MEMBERS

Don’t worry if there isn’t a Branch in your area. Chadwell Heath can provide financial support to enable groups of Members to get together periodically for coffee, lunch, or even afternoon tea! All that is needed is someone to organise the social gathering, so if you would be willing to do this, *please contact Frank Garside, National Volunteer Officer by email at [nvo@blesma.org](mailto:nvo@blesma.org) or by phone on 020 8548 3510*

# Veterans to benefit from £9m investment

**V**eterans and Service personnel are to benefit from £9 million worth of investment into new and improved NHS mental health services.

On 01 April, NHS England launched a brand new mental health service which has been specially tailored to support and treat ex-Armed Forces veterans and Service personnel who are approaching discharge.

The newly commissioned £9m service, known officially as the NHS Transition, Intervention and Liaison (TIL) Veterans' Mental Health Service, will act as a front door to a range of mental health services across the health and care system for 17,500 people over the next three years.

Different levels of specialist treatment, support and healthcare experts will be available – ensuring those who proudly serve and put their lives on the line for their country get the care they deserve, as quickly as possible – all of the time.

## MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Available across England, veterans and Service personnel approaching discharge will be able to self-refer or request referral via their GP or mental health provider, or through military charities such as Blesma. An initial face-to-face assessment will be offered within a fortnight, followed by a clinical appointment two weeks later if appropriate.

The service has been designed to help recognise some of the early signs associated with mental health difficulties and will

provide access to a number of interventions, therapeutic treatments for complex problems and psychological trauma, all aimed at preventing patients from reaching crisis point.

It will also help to tackle some of the most common mental health issues such as alcoholism, anxiety and depression, and will join up services across the board, working with local authorities and charities, so that the needs of the individual and the needs of their families are looked after in the round.

This might also include help and support on practical issues such as housing after discharge, as well as quick access to social care where necessary and an out-of-hours contact in the event of an emergency.

NHS England asked veterans, serving personnel and their families what they would like to see within the new service and what it could do to build on the current provisions already available. The aim is to not only improve mental health and wellbeing but also ensure a smooth transition from Armed Forces healthcare to the NHS and civilian life.

## SUPPORT FOR VETERANS

The three main elements of the service are:

**TRANSITION** (*service for those leaving the Armed Forces*): Feedback from veterans and their families highlighted that more should be done to support a smoother transition from the Armed Forces to the NHS. The new service will work with the MoD to offer mental health support for Armed Forces personnel before their discharge date.



**INTERVENTION** (*service for veterans with complex mental health issues*): Veterans and Service personnel approaching discharge will have an assessment within 14 days of referral. Depending on their needs, they may be offered a clinical appointment. They will be treated by a clinician with an understanding of Armed Forces life and culture. They may also be supported by a care coordinator who will work with other services and organisations, and act as a single point of contact to ensure a coordinated approach to their care.

**LIAISON** (*general service for veterans*): Patients who do not have any complex presentations, but who might benefit from mainstream services, will be referred into local NHS mental health services where they will receive the treatment and support they need.

### DO YOU NEED HELP?

If you are a veteran or a member of the Armed Forces approaching discharge, and you are

experiencing mental health difficulties, please use the information below to get in contact with your local service.

#### NORTH OF ENGLAND

**Email:** [vwals@nhs.net](mailto:vwals@nhs.net)

**Telephone:** 0191 445974

#### MIDLANDS AND EAST OF ENGLAND

**Email:** [mevs@mhm.org.uk](mailto:mevs@mhm.org.uk)

**Telephone:** 0300 323 0137

#### LONDON AND SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

**Email:** [cim-tr.veteranstilservice-lse@nhs.net](mailto:cim-tr.veteranstilservice-lse@nhs.net)

**Telephone:** 020 3317 6818

#### SOUTH CENTRAL AND SOUTH WEST ENGLAND

**Email:** [awp.swveterans@nhs.net](mailto:awp.swveterans@nhs.net)

**Telephone:** 0300 365 0300

### VETERANS AND RESERVISTS MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMME

From 01 April 2016, changes to the Defence Medical Services' Veterans and Reserves Mental Health Programme (VRMHP) have meant that eligible Veterans and Reservists are able to access their closest Department of Community Mental Health (DCMH).

For the vast majority of people, this removes the inconvenience of travelling to the DCMH at Chilwell. Administration of the Programme will move to the DCMH at Colchester. The contact phone number for VRMHP will remain the same, as will the current email address. The department can be contacted on:

**DCMH Colchester, Merville Barracks, Colchester, Essex CO2 7UT**

**Freephone helpline:** 0800 032 6258

**Email:** [DPHCE-DCMHCHL-VRMHP@mod.uk](mailto:DPHCE-DCMHCHL-VRMHP@mod.uk)

### BACKGROUND

The VRMHP provides mental health assessments for Veterans and Reservists who have concerns about their mental health as a result of Service.

### VETERANS

The VRMHP is available to those who have deployed since 1982 and who suffer mental health challenges as a result of operational deployment. The Programme offers a comprehensive mental health assessment by a Consultant Psychiatrist with accompanying guidance on care and treatment from the veteran's NHS GP and/or local NHS clinical team. Veterans should consult their GP in the first instance in order to be referred to the VRMHP.

### RESERVES

Assessment and, where appropriate, outpatient treatment will be provided for mental health problems associated with operational deployment to eligible Reservists who have deployed since 01 January 2003.

### SCOTLAND

Veterans in Scotland can access NHS mental health services via their GP or self-referral to Veterans First Point. Full details can be found at [www.veteransfirstpoint.org.uk](http://www.veteransfirstpoint.org.uk)

This service has expanded to have centres across Scotland supporting veterans and their families with a wide range of issues using peer support workers and, where necessary, clinical support for those who need it.

*For general telephone enquiries, contact the Edinburgh office on 0131 221 7090*

### WALES

Each Local Health Board (LHB) has appointed an experienced clinician as a Veteran Therapist (VT) with an interest or experience of military (mental) health problems. The VT will accept referrals from healthcare staff, GPs, veteran charities and self-referrals from ex-Service personnel.

*The contact details – telephone, email and fax – for the appropriate VT can be found on the relevant LHB page on the website ([www.wales.nhs.uk/ourservices/directory/LocalHealthBoards](http://www.wales.nhs.uk/ourservices/directory/LocalHealthBoards)). Or you can call the 24-hour helpline on 0800 132 737.*

Appointments will be arranged as close to the veteran's home as possible in a suitable venue. The service is not able to respond to emergency referrals. Veterans in crisis should contact their GP or the Out of Hours Service. There is a psychiatrist on-call at all Accident and Emergency Units in District General Hospitals.

### NORTHERN IRELAND

The VRMHP is also a route for assessment for those living in Northern Ireland. In all cases, Members can ask their BSO to assist and support them in accessing this kind of treatment.

# Members' Weekend 2018

09-11 June, 2018

Chesford Grange Hotel, Kenilworth

The 2018 Members' Weekend will again take place at the Chesford Grange Hotel, 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 doing to support Members, please put the date in your diary now and look out for the application form in the next Bulletin.

Blesma covers the cost of Ordinary and Associate Members, and partners or carers. There are no formalities.



# There's an activity out there for everyone!



## FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Children got the opportunity to join their injured parents on a Blesma activity in April. The Blesma Families Activities Weekend was held at Calvert Trust, Exmoor where families were given the opportunity to take part in a variety of adventurous activities.

Becky Copsey joined husband Rob with their two daughters, 13-year-old Neve and 10-year-old Charlotte. During the weekend, families got to ride in an adaptive canoe and have a go at rock climbing.

“It was really good to spend time with families in a similar situation to us. The girls got to see that there are other people out there like their dad, which made it normal,” said Becky. “Meeting the other wives was fantastic, too. We were all able to chat about our past and the problems we have faced, and you see that your experiences are actually normal. The kids loved the activities as well, so it’s definitely something we’d do again.”

Paul Findlay, BSO (London and Kent) was there to ensure that everything ran smoothly.



## CALLING ALL WINTER SPORTS FANS

**Colorado Ski Spectacular: 02-12 Dec 2017**

**Deadline for applications: 20 August 2017**

A chance for beginners and more competent skiers to ski under the guidance of elite instructors from Disabled Snow Sports USA. Members will ski with fellow adapted skiers and work with instructors to make the most of their time on the slopes. This is an amazing social opportunity whilst enjoying everything Breckenridge has to offer!

## WINTER SPORTS EUROPE

**La Plagne: 21-28 January 2018**

**Deadline for applications:**

**01 November 2017**

Following the success of our first Winter sports activity in La Plagne, we will return to the French slopes early in the New Year. Activities will include mono-skiing, ski-boarding, stand up skiing and three track skiing in addition to ski-biking. If you would like the chance to try something new, why not apply to come along?



## WIDOWS' WEEK

A Blesma Widow has overcome a number of personal challenges thanks to a Blesma activity. Sharon Riley made the 100-mile journey having not driven more than 14 miles around her local area to attend her first Widows' Week (above).

Sharon's husband Mick, who served in the Royal Corps of Transport, passed away two years ago and social events that involved spending time with other couples left her feeling uncomfortable. Her feeling of awkwardness gradually grew until eventually Sharon only left the house for hospital appointments – she even got her shopping delivered. In the weeks leading up to the Widows' Week, Sharon admits to almost 'chickening out.'

"I'd never attended a social event alone or stayed away from home since Mick passed. To get to the Princess Marina House I had to travel on a road that Mick and I used every month to visit my mother-in-law, and I had to do it on the anniversary of Mick's passing. I was driving with an awful lot on my mind that day, but I did it and that in itself was a huge boost!"

Sharon spent a week in May with 11 other Widows at the RAF Benevolent Fund's Princess Marina House in Rustington. During the week the ladies, under the wing of BSO (South East) Bill Gillett, ably assisted



by Blesma Welfare Rep Janis Dobbs, attended a number of trips. They visited HMS Victory, treated themselves to a little shopping – something many haven't had the company to do for a long time – and some even climbed to the top of Portsmouth's Spinnaker Tower.

"The Widows' Week was better than any bereavement counselling I have been to," said Sharon. "The company was the best thing about the week – from the second I arrived I was made to feel welcome and there was never any awkwardness. I got talking to the other ladies and I found that the bizarre feelings I felt about Mick's passing were actually normal."

The week was a real confidence boost for Sharon and she has stayed in contact with a few of the ladies, and has already paid a visit to one. Sharon would highly recommend the Widows' Week to fellow Blesma Widows.

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*If you have any questions about activities or would like to put your name forward for an event, please contact Emily on 020 8548 7094 or by email at [mea@blesma.org](mailto:mea@blesma.org)*

# Members make Blesma Week a hit!

**T**hank you to all those who got involved with Blesma Week 2017. Members Kirk Bowett, Stu Pearson and Craig Howorth launched the week when they took part in the Yorkshire Three Peaks Challenge. Elsewhere, lots of Members joined the Fundraising Team throughout the week for bucket collections, making an incredible impact on both our fundraising and awareness raising. We hope that everyone who took part had a wonderful time and enjoyed a cracking day of cricket at the Inter Services T20 at Lord's. Thanks to your support, Blesma Week was a resounding success once again! If you would like to get involved in next year's event or be kept up to date with all our fundraising opportunities, please sign up to our fundraising e-newsletter by emailing [fundraising@blesma.org](mailto:fundraising@blesma.org)

Here are just a few of the events that have taken place (or are taking place) this year...

## 1 FROM MARRIAGE TO MUD

There were some special moments at the Nuclear Races this year. More than 185 participants (including 10 Blesma Members) took part in the Blesma wave, raising more than £12,000 for the Association. We would like to say thank you to all who took part and made it a day to remember.

Congratulations to Blesma Member Rob Copey and his new bride Becky! They got married in style on the morning of the event, and went straight from the altar to the mud with 40 of their guests to raise money for Blesma. After overcoming more than 70 obstacles, they cleaned up and headed

off to their wedding reception. It was also a very special day for Blesma Member Andy Bracey who, supported by his family and friends, conquered the course with his upper body strength and unbelievable amounts of grit and determination. He tried out our Nuclear Rush taster session earlier this year and then decided he would go all in and tackle the gruelling 7km muddy course, which is packed with challenging obstacles. We take our hats off to you Andy!

## 2 FALL FOR THE FALLEN

### Go Skydive, Salisbury

12-13 August

Ok, this isn't part of Blesma Week, but this event is a favourite on the fundraising calendar and always promises to be fun. Is jumping out of a plane something you are interested in doing? *If you would like to do a tandem skydive, contact Jess or Emily in the Activities Team on 020 8548 3519 / 7094, or email [activities@blesma.org](mailto:activities@blesma.org). If you would like to get your friends and family involved, contact the Fundraising Team at [events@blesma.org](mailto:events@blesma.org)*

## 3 WELL DONE LUKE!

Member Luke Delahunty completed his third London Marathon this year by taking part in the Day Chair London Marathon heat. It was a wonderful day with a buzzing atmosphere. In total, Blesma had a team of 12 runners and together they raised a fantastic £30,000 for the Association. Well done and thanks to all who took part!



#### 4 ZIP WORLD'S VELOCITY

There will be no slowing down this September as Blesma's bravest and boldest hurtle headfirst at speeds of 100mph!

Mount Snowdon, or Yr Wyddfa in Welsh, is one of the highest peaks in the British Isles and is also home to Zip World's Velocity – the fastest zip line in the world and the longest in Europe. This September, for the first time, Blesma is trying it out over the Penrhyn Quarry in Bethesda.

With stunning views of Anglesey (and even the Isle of Man on a clear day!), it promises to be a trip to remember. Participants can expect to reach speeds of over 100mph! Would you like to try the nearest thing to flying? *To get involved, contact [events@blesma.org](mailto:events@blesma.org) or call 020 8548 7089*

#### 5 GO QUACKERS FOR THE ANNUAL AMESBURY DUCK RACE!

Blesma Member Andy Derry will be holding his annual duck race on 28 August in aid of the Association. One thousand plastic ducks will race on the River Avon in this awesome event and you can get involved! You can purchase your own duck for just £2 – all the money raised will go to Blesma and there are some fantastic prizes up for grabs.

To take part in the race, please send a cheque payable to Blesma (£2 per duck) along with your name and contact number, to The Duck Race, Blesma Fundraising Team, 185-187 High Road, Chadwell Heath, Essex RM6 6NA. The event is held on the River Avon, Lords Walk, Amesbury Wiltshire.

The ducks will set sail at 15:00 and winners will be announced on the day.

# What's going on at a Branch near you?

## **BOURNEMOUTH BRANCH**

*Stephen Whitchurch*

*09 April 1940 - 08 October 2016*

*Maureen Whitchurch*

*28 April 1945 - 18 December 2016*

It is strange but true how little you know about a Blesma Member until you are sitting in a pew as you say farewell. Such was the case with Stephen and his wife Maureen, both very proud to have served in the Royal Marines.

In December 1962, I was serving on HMS Plymouth. We had just 'chased' the carrier HMS VICTORIOUS up to Suez and picked up her relief CENTAUR and were carrying out exercises off the coast of Somalia, heading south for Mombasa. Meanwhile, Stephen was with Lima Company 42 Commando in Singapore. The Sultan of Brunei had declined to join the Malay Federation and many of his subjects, namely the TNKU militants, were most unhappy about the decision so they seized the British Administrator and his family in the small town of Limbang. They stated that if their demands were not met the 12 hostages would be hanged.

L Coy 42 Commando, commanded by Captain Jeremy Moore, were tasked with their rescue. They embarked on two Z lighters (motorised barges with open flat decks and very little cover) crewed by Navy personnel, and set off up the river to Limbang. The rebels had captured the police station, along with a Bren (LMG), several rifles and an assortment of shotguns, and offered stiff resistance. Two Marines were killed before they got ashore but the remainder stormed

the police station and moved towards the hospital where they found the hostages loudly singing christmas carols to identify where they were. All were safely rescued.

The rescue party then went on to clear the town but sadly a further three Marines were killed. Captain Moore was awarded a bar to his Military Cross and the two Corporals – Lester and Rawlinson – were awarded the Military Medal. I served with 'Sticks' Bob Rawlinson on HMS PROTECTOR a few years later. He was in my watch on deck, yet he never spoke of this.

The Corps celebrates Limbang Day once every 10 years on 12 December, the next celebration being in 2022. L Company 42 Commando was renamed Limbang Company, in honour of this action.

Stephen and Maureen met at the Depot in Deal, where she was serving in the WRNS under the Marines cap badge. They married and Stephen was posted to Singapore, where their son Neil was born. It must have been very difficult for all the families to remain in quarters, knowing that their husbands were going into harm's way. Stephen was invalided out in 1977 and joined a furniture company in Plymouth. Claire had joined them by this time and the 'surprise' baby, Leslie, made the family complete.

After mixed fortunes they moved to Bournemouth, and when the children left home they moved into the War Memorial Homes, a 'Village for Veterans' built just after WWII. It was in about 2005 that I first visited Stephen in hospital, as he was about to have



his left leg amputated above the knee. I don't think he ever got over it.

Maureen (Mo) did her best to care for him but he was a big man, 6'4", and it became far too much for her. Stephen was taken into care and, shortly after that, Maureen was diagnosed with cancer. Stephen died in October, Maureen died in December. A sad story, but one that should not go untold.

**Peter Sherston-Baker**

### WALSALL AND DISTRICT BRANCH

The Branch Committee saw a couple of changes at the AGM in March, with Mike Gallagher and Mal James doing Secretary job swaps. Mike took over from Mal as Secretary of the Midlands Area, and Mal took over from Mike as the Branch Secretary.

At the time of writing, we are looking forward to our Summer Lunch at our usual venue, The Shropshire Golf Centre, and to welcoming our guests Colonel Richard Maybery, Deputy Commander, 11th Signal



and West Midlands Brigade, and Mrs Patricia Cox, former Welfare Manager at Veterans UK.

With the Members' Weekend at Kenilworth, Armed Forces Day, and the Chadwell Heath staff visit to the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA), we had a lot to look forward to in June. The Branch 'manned' a gazebo again at the NMA on Armed Forces Day.

The renovations at the National Memorial Arboretum are now complete, providing a new entrance hall, visitor's centre, improved catering facilities and enhanced wheelchair

access around the site. The two entrance plinths to our garden have been replaced, and a new one has been erected by our orchard.

The new signpost, funded by our Branch, is in place, pointing the way to the Blesma Garden. Our committee and spouses were all invited to the Chadwell Heath Staff visit on 28 June, Martin Kettrick gave a talk, which was followed by lunch and the dedication of the new plinths.

In August, we have a visit to Grimsthorpe Castle as part of the Midlands Area outing – it promises to be an excellent day out!

**Mal James, Secretary**

### SUTTON AND MERTON BRANCH

The inaugural meeting of Sutton and Merton Branch took place on 07 March, 1949.

Five years later, in 1954, the Sutton and District Ladies' Bowling Association was formed and members immediately said they would like to run a competition for Blesma. Has the Association had any more loyal supporters than these ladies? Sutton and Merton Branch would like to put in writing our gratitude to our loyal supporters!

They organised a triples competition with the proceeds being donated to Blesma at their Presidents' Day. The first Presidents' Day dinner was attended by Sutton and Merton Branch members, the late Dr Elizabeth and Charles Frankland Moore. They immediately offered to supply the trophy – a silver rose bowl. So this competition became known as the 'Frankland Moore Blesma Triples' with the trophy being engraved with the names

of winners from 1955. As one of the past presidents said: "The ladies have had many highs and lows since 1954 competing for this trophy, and very tough but enjoyable competitors have been met on the way to the final."

Sadly, the Ladies' Bowling Association closed at the end of 2016 as the members were unable to find anyone willing to take on the roles of officers – unfortunately all too common these days.

It's impossible to calculate how many thousands of pounds the ladies have donated to Blesma over 62 years. The President and Secretary attended our last AGM and presented us with a final cheque for £4,000. They have said they will try to get some of the local Bowling Associations to set up competitions for us. The Silver Rose Bowl was presented to Sutton Library Museum as it is a beautiful piece of local history. We are fortunate that the Men's Sutton and District Bowling Association is still managing to function but maybe not for much longer. They have supported us since 1951.

Does Blesma have any other long-standing supporters who deserve recognition?

Any Blesma Members in the Sutton and Merton area would be very welcome at our Branch meetings held at The Morden Brook, Lower Morden Lane, Morden SM4 4SS. General Meetings are held on the first Wednesday in February, June, July, August and October at noon. For more information, email [patricia.robinson1@btinternet.com](mailto:patricia.robinson1@btinternet.com)  
**Patricia A. Robinson, Honorary Secretary**

# Armed Forces Day 2017



In June, the nation once again honoured all those who are serving or who have served in the Armed Forces. Blesma was represented at 18 locations around the UK from Plymouth to Edinburgh, including this year's National event in Liverpool.

Great Yarmouth Branch held a raffle at the Lowestoft day, Bournemouth Branch Members were out on Weymouth sea front and Walsall Branch were at the National Memorial Arboretum. Meanwhile, individual Members were doing their bit for the cause. Jim Freel in South Tyneside and Mark Hancock in Weston Super Mare played their part, while the BSOs attended events in Plymouth, Wiltshire, St Ives, Southend, Beverley and Edinburgh.

Volunteers also came forward to assist and the Association is very grateful to them all for doing so.

## Want to chat to your BSO? Just get in touch...

### CONTACT YOUR BSO

Don't be shy – if you would like support or advice, contact your Blesma Support Officer

#### BSO (North) **STEVE BURTON**

Tel: 0131 226 2910 Mob: 07766 258461

Email: [bsonorth@blesma.org](mailto:bsonorth@blesma.org)

#### BSO (North West) **MIKE DOWNES**

Tel: 01257 795144 Mob: 07825 536362

Email: [bsonw@blesma.org](mailto:bsonw@blesma.org)

#### BSO (North East) **PETER SHIELDS** MBE QGM

Tel: 01469 532176 Mob: 07908 667219

Email: [bsone@blesma.org](mailto:bsone@blesma.org)

#### BSO (Eastern) **TOM ORMISTON**

Tel: 01480 469216 Mob: 07825 536364

Email: [bsoeastern@blesma.org](mailto:bsoeastern@blesma.org)

#### BSO (Midlands)

#### **PLEASE CONTACT CHADWELL HEATH**

Tel: 020 8548 9459

Email: [membersupport@blesma.org](mailto:membersupport@blesma.org)

#### BSO (South East) **BILL GILLET**

Tel: 01980 629337 Mob: 07920 092329

Email: [bsose@blesma.org](mailto:bsose@blesma.org)

#### BSO (South West) **STEVE FRASER** MBE

Tel: 01278 789393 Mob: 07788 312747

Email: [bsosw@blesma.org](mailto:bsosw@blesma.org)

#### BSO (London and Kent) **PAUL FINDLAY**

Tel: 01268 415290 Mob: 07469 242277

Email: [bsolk@blesma.org](mailto:bsolk@blesma.org)

# Blesma Families Project: an update



## FAMILIES PROJECT

*A message from Dr Hilary Engward,  
Co-Lead Researcher*

Blesma's Families Project is well underway, exploring the needs of veterans and their families. In collaboration with the Veterans and Families Institute at Anglia Ruskin University, this project was developed to gather information on the everyday lived experience of limb loss.

So far, families across the UK have responded to our calls to participate and have been generous in sharing their stories and speaking openly with the research team. Members, their partners, and wider family members have spoken candidly about the everyday realities of living with limb loss. Importantly, they have described what it

is like for Members to transition back into their family home following amputation, the challenges of everyday living with an amputation, how families cope with caring responsibilities at home, and perspectives on both prosthetics care and NHS health and social care services.

We have used all this information from the interviews to develop the second phase of the project. We took into consideration what participants told us during their interviews and used this to develop two questionnaires – one for Members and one for their carers – to see if any of this information relates to wider Blesma Members.

These questionnaires were handed out at this year's Members' Weekend. If you and your carer would like to complete these questionnaires, please do contact us and we

will send them out to you. All the information from both the interviews and questionnaires is currently being analysed to create an informed understanding of how the family unit lives with limb loss and what support Blesma provides for its Members.

These findings will inform how Blesma can better understand families' needs and enhance their support now and in the future. Our further aim is that this project will have wide-reaching impact across services providing for amputees and their families, including charities and health and social care services specific to veterans and those that serve the general population.

We would like to thank all Members who have participated in the project thus far, either through interview or questionnaire, for your openness and for sharing the realities of what everyday life is like for you and your family. We have very much valued your honesty and, to those of you who I've interviewed, thank you for welcoming me into your homes to talk about what has been important to you.

We are looking for people to take part in the next phase of the Families Project. We would like to hear about you and your family's everyday experience of living with limb loss, and establish if what we have found out so far is reflective of your experiences. We would especially like to hear from you if you have upper limb loss or are a female veteran. If you are interested in taking part, or would like to find out more about the project, please do contact us.

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**Hilary can be contacted at:**

**Email:** [hilary.engward@gmail.com](mailto:hilary.engward@gmail.com)

or [hilary.engward@anglia.ac.uk](mailto:hilary.engward@anglia.ac.uk)

**Telephone:** 01245 684106

**In writing:** Veterans and Families Institute,  
Anglia Ruskin University, Chelmsford,  
Essex CM1 1SQ

## Help us to keep you connected

If you are moving home, or have changed your telephone number or email address, please let us know. This will help us to keep our records as up to date as possible, ensuring your Blesma Support Officer can contact you, and that you receive not only the magazine and Members' Bulletins, but also any email updates about forthcoming activities and events.

**Please let Elaine in Membership Services know of any changes to your contact details by calling her on 020 8548 7093 or emailing her at [memberadmin@blesma.org](mailto:memberadmin@blesma.org)**

## Why not nominate an email buddy?

We are conscious that in this world of emails, the internet and social media, there are many Members who are unable to access emails easily or who do not wish to make use of these methods of communicating. Please be assured that we will always provide hard copies of our publications to Members who rely on receiving information through their letterboxes. However, for those of you who have members of your family or friends who could receive emails on your behalf, please let us know by emailing **the Membership Services Team at [memberadmin@blesma.org](mailto:memberadmin@blesma.org)** so that we can update our records and add your details to our electronic mailing lists.

# Maintaining Independence

## MAINTAINING INDEPENDENCE: A PILOT STUDY INTO THE HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELLBEING OF OLDER LIMBLESS VETERANS

### An update from the Research Team

Northumbria University and Anglia Ruskin University, supported by Blesma, have been commissioned to undertake research into the health and wellbeing of older veterans who have lost a limb, either during or post-Service.

This study is now one year in and researchers from both universities have interviewed all of the 32 veterans across the country who agreed to take part.

Some participants (and family members) have been interviewed more than once and researchers have been welcomed into the homes, as well as the family lives, of the veterans taking part.

It is anticipated that the interview stage of the study will be completed ahead of schedule, allowing researchers time to start analysing the data.

The response to the call for veterans to take part in the study has been fantastic, helped enormously by Blesma Member and Trustee Bob Monkhouse and Welfare Rep Helen Cullen.

This research into the issues faced by veterans who are aged between 40 and 70-plus is of huge significance in the UK. This project aims to address the gap in knowledge and understanding regarding the limbless veteran population, and aims to create significant impact by shaping future



health and social care policy and provision for limbless veterans.

Blesma Support Officers have been on hand to offer support and guidance when and where necessary, and this has proved extremely helpful to researchers.

# Case Study: Chris Hogarth

**F**ormer Royal Navy Petty Officer Chris Hogarth was 65 years old when a plane crash left him with life-changing injuries that resulted in him begging doctors to amputate his leg.

After leaving the Navy in 1977, Chris (having got his yacht skipper's ticket) began working on private yachts. During this time, he also got his Private Pilot's Licence. In 1984 he moved to Spain, firstly to Marbella, then to Mallorca in 1990.

By 2008, Chris was no stranger to the sky and on one sunny Saturday he decided he would enjoy an evening of flying.

"I used to have a KITFOX mono aeroplane. The engine had been misfiring, so I called the mechanic," recalls Chris. "He didn't seem particularly interested and told me to do all the pre-take off checks again. I did a full power run up on the ground and the engine didn't miss a beat, so I took off."

Chris was 100 feet in the air when the engine stopped. He just had time to turn off the electrics before the plane hit the ground at about 55mph. The plane flipped over onto its back but fortunately didn't burst into flames. From this point on Chris blacked out.

The accident resulted in a broken left leg, Chris's right leg was hanging off, he had two broken wrists, a badly injured lower jaw, his right eye was hanging out and he lost most of his teeth. He was very close to death and was taken to the local hospital in Mallorca.

Chris's left leg was amputated straight away but doctors thought they could save his right leg. The tibia had broken in Chris's



left leg but the fibula was still in one piece so doctors tried to repair his right left with the fibula bone from his left leg.

After many operations and skin grafts, and more than a year spent in three hospitals, Chris was in a bad state. He even caught a hospital bug which nearly killed him.

"I begged the doctors to amputate my right leg. After a lot of consideration they agreed, but they didn't think I would survive a full anaesthetic, so they gave me a local anaesthetic in the spine. It was an operation that I would not like to repeat! I could hear the doctors talking, and could feel everything they did – but just without the pain."

Shortly after his second leg was amputated, Chris was fitted with two prosthetics legs and, to everyone's surprise, he was up and walking on them within just a few weeks.

Now aged 74, Chris is still active every day using his prosthetic legs, he drives an automatic car that has not been converted in any way, and has converted his Kawasaki VN800 classic motorbike into a trike.

# Spotlight on Benefits

**W**elcome to the Bulletin's regular section on the benefits system. As well as highlighting some useful information regarding benefits we will also be raising awareness of some health and social care matters.

## CHANGES TO BENEFITS

The government often makes changes to benefits criteria and the majority of these are made at the start of the new tax year. Here, we highlight some of these changes:

## EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE

Employment and Support Allowance is the benefit working age people may be entitled to if they have limited capability for work due to ill health or disability.

Ongoing eligibility for the benefit is tested under a Work Capability Assessment. If the assessment is satisfied, a claimant will be placed in either the Work Related Activity Group or Support Group. For those in the Work Related Activity Group there are more conditions attached to the claim, such as work preparation requirements.

Until April, claimants were entitled to an extra payment for each of these groups. However, for those in the Work Related Activity Group, the extra payment has been abolished unless the claim started before April 2017.

## TAX CREDITS

From April, support provided through Child Tax Credit has been limited for some new births. If claimants already have two or more children, any subsequent children born after 06 April 2017 are not eligible for further support through Child Tax Credit. There are exemptions to these rules including, amongst others, children born in multiple birth. The 'family element' of £545 will also be abolished for new claimants where the eldest child was born after 06 April 2017.

## BEREAVEMENT BENEFITS

The current system of bereavement benefits, including Bereavement Payment, Bereavement Allowance and Widowed Parent's Allowance, have been replaced with a new single Bereavement Support Payment, which was introduced in April.

The system will now focus support on the 18-month period immediately following the bereavement. This is a big departure, especially in terms of Widowed Parent's Allowance, which is currently paid until a child leaves non-advanced education.

In the current system, bereavement benefits are taken into account when calculating entitlement to means-tested benefits, and Bereavement Allowance and Widowed Parent's Allowance are both included within the Benefit Cap. Bereavement Support Payment, on the other hand, will not affect means-tested benefit entitlement and will not be included within the Benefit Cap.

## SOCIAL SECURITY (SCOTLAND) BILL INTRODUCED

The Bill, which is brought forward following changes to the devolution settlement affected by the Scotland Act 2016, puts in place a legislative framework for the administration of social security in Scotland. Responsibility for 11 benefits have been devolved, including benefits for disability, including Personal Independence Payment and Attendance Allowance. Changes to these 11 benefits, if any, are still to be published. Blesma will be monitoring any changes to benefits in Scotland as a result of the Bill, and we will be keeping Members updated as changes are announced.

## WAR PENSION DISREGARD FOR SOCIAL CARE CHARGING ASSESSMENTS

For those living in England, Scotland and Wales, the government recently announced changes to the way the War Pension is treated as income when calculating a person's weekly charge towards their social care package (whether residential care or home care).

When people have a local authority social care assessment, they may be expected to have a financial assessment to calculate their contribution towards the care costs. Previously, a War Pension would be treated as income, after a £10 disregard, although some local authorities had opted to discretionarily disregard the income.

However, from April, the War Pension should be fully disregarded, apart from any Constant Attendance Allowance received. This brings it more into line with the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, which is fully disregarded.

There is yet to be an announcement from the Northern Ireland government regarding this. The Republic of Ireland will be unaffected by this announcement

as the government has its own regulations. Blesma has heard some anecdotal evidence where a number of local authorities have written to people affected and have recalculated their charge for care.

However, if you receive a War Pension and have a local authority care package, we would advise that you check your assessed charge for care to ensure this disregard has now been applied. You should contact your BSO if this has not been applied and if you need assistance in taking this up with your local authority.

These changes do not affect a War Widows Pension, which is still taken into account as income less the standard £10 disregard.

## VETERANS OYSTER PHOTOCARD

If you receive payments under the War Pension Scheme (including War Widows Pension), or Guaranteed Income Payment under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, you could be eligible for concessionary travel in areas of London.

With a Veterans Oyster Photocard you can travel free on the bus, tube, tram, DLR, London Overground, TfL Rail and most National Rail Services in London. Other services, such as river services and Emirates Air Line, can receive a discount.

You can apply by calling 0343 222 1234 (TfL call charges apply) to request an application form. You will need to complete and return this form with:

- A photocopy of your award notification or annual updating letter from Veterans UK or the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency dated within the last two years
- A passport sized photo

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*For more information or advice on the scheme, please visit [www.tfl.gov.uk](http://www.tfl.gov.uk) and search for 'veterans oyster card'*

# Double amputee is set to take on The Matterhorn



Neil Heritage, a double above-knee amputee from Dorset, will attempt to summit the Matterhorn in August. The former Corporal, who was injured by a suicide bomber in Iraq in 2004, attempted the climb last year but had to make the tough decision to turn back.

“A number of things went wrong the first time around, but this year we have changed a lot of things, including the prosthetics, so we have a much better chance of success,” said Neil, who has completed triathlons, learned to scuba dive and ski, and completed a 3,000-mile row across the Atlantic as part of the Row2Recovery team since being injured.

Neil is undertaking the challenge in support of Blesma to say thank you for all the support the Association has given him since he was injured. Good luck Neil!

## THE LATEST INFO ON BENEFITS

A Benefits information section has been created on the Blesma website which focuses on disability, carers and out of work benefits. We will be adding to the list of benefits featured over the coming weeks but in the meantime, if you would like more information, have any questions about your benefits entitlement, or would like hints and tips on how to fill in claim forms, please **contact your BSO or Liz in the Membership Services Team on 020 8548 3516 or by email at [membersupport@blesma.org](mailto:membersupport@blesma.org)**

## SECOND PLACE AT FIRST TRI

Blesma Member John Williams won a silver medal in the German Para Triathlon Championships in July. John lost his left leg after he was accidentally electrocuted on a training exercise in 1987. He joined his local triathlon club last September and since then has been training for the event, which included a 5km run, 0.5km swim and 20km cycle.

“We were sent on our swim along with 50 non-disabled participants. That was my introduction to open water swimming and I got elbowed, dunked and swam over, but I achieved my aim – to be first in our swim classification,” said 58-year-old John.

The Blesma man now has his sights set on taking part in the London Triathlon, which consists of a 1,500-metre swim, 40km cycle and 10km run.

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