

Blesma

The magazine for limbless and injured veterans | Summer 2023

PLUS:
LIVING WITH LOSS OF
USE OF LIMB STUDY
RACING PIGEONS
AIMING FOR PARA
ROWING GLORY
ANNUAL REPORT 2022

BULLETIN INSIDE

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BLOWN UP SERVING
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THE MOMENT THAT
CHANGED HIS LIFE



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Members' Survey vital to steer Association's five-year strategy

THE MEMBERSHIP WAS RECENTLY ASKED TO COMMENT ON WHAT THE ASSOCIATION DOES AND HOW IT DOES IT. THE RESULTS ARE IN AND WILL SET THE TONE FOR BLESMA'S FUTURE

Satisfaction with the work of the Association but a strong desire for more face-to-face and personal contact are the main findings that have come out of Blesma's recent Members' Survey.

"The responses we have obtained are vital as we look to outline our strategy over the next five years," said Blesma Vice-Chair Steve White.

The survey was conducted by charity sector experts nfpResearch last year. An initial questionnaire

was sent to all Members and beneficiaries, with approximately 15% of the membership taking the time to submit their responses. These findings were then supported by more in-depth interviews with a representative sample of 40 people drawn from all ages and categories of membership.

The findings saw the membership divided into four broad categories, each with slightly different perspectives on the Association

and how it should support them. These categories were:

- Younger veterans (aged under 50)
- Middle-aged veterans (50-69)
- Older veterans (70+)

- Widows

These broad groups were further sub-divided by:

- Those injured in service/later civilian life
- Loss of limb/loss of use of limb
- More restricted/less restricted to a wheelchair

Above: Member helping Member is a vital part of Blesma's appeal

Welcome



Social interaction and face-to-face contact are important to all Members

AND THE SURVEY SAYS...

With its no-nonsense responsiveness, Blesma has established itself as an organisation (and, for many, the only organisation) that they can turn to.

- **96% of Members surveyed** said they had used Blesma in the past decade. 73% identified Blesma as the military charity that has been especially helpful to them.
- **55% of those surveyed** received support from Blesma but not from other military charities. Only 13% received any support from non-military charities.

Depending on how Members were categorised, the preferred support varies. Younger Members want more challenging physical activities whilst older Members and Widows spoke more about care needs and social events. Recommendations are that Blesma applies specific service standards for each group.

“THE RESPONSES WE HAVE HAD ARE VITAL AS WE LOOK TO OUTLINE OUR STRATEGY OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS”

The key challenges for Members are mobility and physical health, along with access to prosthetics. These physical issues, combined with opportunities for socialising and activities, are the main reasons that people look to charities for support.

This is reflected in how Members most commonly use Blesma: over the past decade, the highest proportion of Members have received financial or practical support (55%), or participated in local activities and social events (50%). Social inclusion provides wellbeing benefits and is especially important to older Members.

Whilst the membership was positive about the work of the Association, some Members spoke about the need for more face-to-face contact with Blesma’s welfare staff,



Welcome to the summer issue. Inside, we cover the impact of the Iraq War with an interview with Pete Norton GC. We also report on some of the key findings of the second Caring and Coping research study,

which examines the key issues facing those dealing with the uncertainty of living with loss of use. There are reports on activities and events from across the Association, and from the Members’ Survey and follow-up interviews conducted at the end of last year/beginning of 2023.

This has been a busy but successful year so far. Our two-year joint campaign with Help for Heroes to replace funding for veterans’ mobility has been successful, with the Government allocating £3 million in the Spring Budget. Elsewhere, Hari Budha Magar has inspired all of us and proved just how much can be achieved by summiting Mount Everest on his prosthetic legs. Blesma has also been actively involved in advising Ukrainian organisations that are supporting those injured in the Russian invasion.

Members will be aware of changes in Blesma’s management, including my own departure after three years as Chief Executive. Ian Harper has also handed over to Brian Chenier as Director Independence and Wellbeing, ensuring that we keep up our support to Members while the Association transitions to a new Chief Executive. It has been a privilege to lead the organisation through the pandemic and beyond – and an absolute pleasure to spend time with Blesma’s Members. Thank you and enjoy the issue.

Jon Bryant
Chief Executive





WHAT YOU WANT FROM YOUR ASSOCIATION

Unsurprisingly, there were significant variations in what individual Members value most about the Association. When asked to name the most important aspect of Blesma's support, responses from Members included:

- Help with the cost of wheelchairs
- Mobility scooter
- Help with PIP forms
- Information on new prosthetic technology
- Friendship. Support. Banter
- Opportunities to look forward to social meet-ups
- The local Support Officer. Someone who checks in on me. Someone who I can call and will answer
- An iPad for online banking and communicating with friends and family. Also online books
- Help with my garden
- Photo club – it gets me out of the house
- Adventurous activities e.g. skiing, sailing, fishing
- Blesma magazine
- The Members' Weekend
- With Blesma, I'm not different, I don't stand out. I truly fit in and feel the same as everybody else. That's priceless

as well as with other Members. "We are happy that the overwhelming feelings from the membership are of warmth and positivity," said Steve, "but we recognise that we can do better, and the Board is working on how we can respond to what our Members tell us they want from their Association."

The survey, along with the Board's response, will be discussed in more detail at this year's Annual General Meeting.



Bathroom adaptations grant "has made our lives better"

A Blesma grant has boosted home life for RAF veteran Olaf Jones by funding the refurbishment of his bathrooms. The much-needed refit was only possible after he applied to Eastern Area BSO Kevin Long.

"I have been a Blesma Member for more than 25 years and have never asked for assistance before, but now was a time that I really needed some help," said Olaf, whose left arm was amputated above the elbow after a superbike accident during practice for the Isle of Man TT races. He needed adaptations to the bathrooms after an illness left him with mobility issues.

His wife, Barbara, cashed in a pension but the couple were still short of the funds needed for the work on their home.

"We bought the fixtures and fittings, and Blesma's grant covered most of the labour, which was about 40% of the total costs. We realised that we weren't set up for the future as I had been ill and suffered mobility issues, so the work was critical but we couldn't have afforded it without Blesma's help," said Olaf, who is a former member of the RAF Motorsports Association and represented the RAF at the famous Isle of Man TT races.

"The adaptations make the bathrooms easier for the rest of the family to use, so it is better all round. We are extremely grateful and would like to thank Kev for his diligence and dedicated assistance, and Blesma for the very generous financial grant. It has made our lives better."

GAM TAKES TO THE SKIES AT BLESMA EVENT

Member Gambahadur Gurung has taken to the skies for a thrilling zipwire ride organised by Blesma. The former Gurkha Rifleman joined a daredevil team of Members to brave the Skywire at Hangloose Bluewater Adventure Park in Kent, which reaches speeds of up to 60mph.

"It was an amazing experience. I've done a lot of great things with Blesma and now I can fly!" joked Gam, who served for 16 years with the 6th Queen Elizabeth Own Gurkha Rifles. "It was the thrill of a lifetime."

The event was organised by the London and Kent Area. "It was great to meet up with old friends and meet new people," added Gam. "It was so enjoyable to be with Blesma Members and share a memorable day."





Jon Bryant to step down as Blesma Chief Executive

Blesma's Chief Executive, Jon Bryant, has announced that he will be leaving the Association after a little more than three years in the role. Since he joined in 2020, Jon has helped steer Blesma through the Covid pandemic while strengthening a number of the Association's policies and practices in support of its Members.

"Jon leaves the organisation in great shape, with an excellent reputation across the sector for knowing its Members personally, reinforcing the friendships between them, representing their interests and quickly providing expert advice and assistance," said Blesma's Chairman General Sir Adrian Bradshaw. "Whilst we are disappointed to see him leave, we are very grateful for the way he has steered Blesma through a particularly challenging period and set us up for the next phase of our development as a charity."

Jon is planning to remain in post to steer the Association in the coming months while the search for a new Chief Executive takes place over the summer. The search for Jon's replacement has already begun and will include the Blesma membership.

"It has been an honour and a privilege to serve Blesma as the Chief Executive for the past three years," said Jon. "It has been a demanding period, but the Association has emerged from the Covid pandemic in great shape, with our reputation for knowing our Members and supporting them with the minimum of fuss as strong as ever.

"I know that Blesma will continue to flourish, and I will remain a dedicated supporter of this fine Association. I will take with me very many fond memories of the time that I have spent with truly inspiring people."

KNITTERS ARE DOING THEIR BIT FOR SOLDIERS

HONORARY MEMBER JOYCE Meader has been putting her skills to work knitting socks for Ukrainian troops on the frontline of the fight to repel invading Russian forces.

The 64 year old, who produces knitwear for historical societies and films, responded to an international call for aid for soldiers enduring trench warfare.

"Their conditions are appalling and they run the risk of developing trench foot because their feet get wet and they cannot leave their positions," said Joyce, who is a regular volunteer at Blesma events. Along with other knitters from around the country, she has been making socks that are at least 75% wool for



Ukrainian soldiers to put on overnight to keep their feet dry and warm.

"It is not much, but it does make a difference for them and we are all happy to help," added Joyce, who is a member of the Southampton Branch and who is regarded as one of the UK's foremost historical experts on military knitwear.

GOT A STORY? GET IN TOUCH!

Have you got a story you'd like to tell? Want some help publicising an event or expedition you're planning? To put your story in the magazine just get in touch at editor@blesma.org

Making history: Hari on the summit of Everest



Pictures: Abiral Rai, Shantanepali Productions Jeet Bahadur Tamang

Blesma man makes history on Mt Everest

Hari Budha Magar has become the first double above-knee amputee to summit Mount Everest. The 43 year old reached the 8,848m (29,029ft) peak on 19 May after a gruelling ascent of the world's highest mountain. He was given a hero's welcome in Kathmandu, the Nepalese capital, and was greeted by the nation's Prime Minister who praised his courage and dedication.

Hari, a former corporal, who served in 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles, had been training for the attempt for more than five years and even had to lobby officials in Nepal to overturn a ban on people with disabilities climbing Everest in 2018. Hari lost both his legs to an IED while on patrol in Afghanistan in 2010, and recovered his confidence and independence through sports before going



on to claim a range of world firsts as a disabled mountaineer.

He crowdfunded to pay for much of his training and his cutting-edge kit – which included specially designed crampons, heated sockets and engineered prosthetic legs – but was also supported by a number of charities, including Blesma.

Hari began the climb in the Himalayas on 17 April – exactly 13 years after he lost his legs in the IED blast. He and his team faced an 18-day wait for an appropriate 'weather window' which would allow him to make the final push to the summit. Led by Krish Thapa, former SAS Chief Mountain Instructor, and supported by a Nepalese team that included Hari's brother, the team came close to running out of oxygen.

"The journey wasn't easy. We had to make some tough decisions along the way but we made it. We reached the top of the world," said Hari. His goals were to honour fallen comrades, conquer adversity, change perceptions about what people with disability can achieve, and to raise funds for five charities including Blesma and the Gurkha Welfare Trust.

"After losing my legs in 2010, I spent years struggling with difficult thoughts and feeling like I had nothing to offer the world," said Hari, who served as a Gurkha for 15 years. "It's thanks to an amazing team that we not only summited Everest, but that we all made it back safely. It is as much their achievement as it is mine.

"Between 12 and 15% of the world's population have some kind of disability. If after reading or watching my story, someone finds hope and a purpose to live before they give up, finds the courage to move forward when they are struggling, or finds the motivation to achieve something in their life I would be happy that I made a difference."





John Sandford-Hart has completed a record seven London Marathons

A true marathon effort by all at Team Blesma

Blesma's London Marathon runners raised more than £30,000 in April and even broke a world record along the way. Member John Sandford-Hart (above) completed his seventh London Marathon to earn a place in the record books for the most successful completions of the course on crutches.

Garry Moore, whose 96-year-old father Stan served in the Royal Artillery, and friend Andy McAvoy raised more than £7,000 from a Soul Night in Southend to back their efforts around the 26.2-mile course. Rivermead Rotary Club, in Chelmsford, selected Blesma as its

Charity of the Year and Natalie Jeapes – daughter of the club's president Julia Jeapes – ran the marathon and was backed by a share of the £2,000 that club members raised at a quiz night for Blesma and the Turkish Earthquake Appeal.

Eva Georgiou, Head of ESG and Engagement at NRS Healthcare, a Blesma corporate partner that supplies more than 4,500 independent living aids, raised £3,202 from her run. NRS Healthcare will match Eva's fundraising, taking the total to more than £6,000. Team Blesma were roared on at the Blesma Cheer Point and by the thousands lining the London streets.

News in brief



LOOK THE PART IN NEW BRANDED BLESMA GEAR

Stylish new Blesma branded zip-up hoodies and pin badges have recently gone on sale on the Association's website. Both items will also be on sale at Members' Weekend but if you're not going, all stock can be purchased at the online shop at <https://blesma.org/support-us/online-shop>



DONATIONS BY THE BUCKETLOAD

A bucket collection in Glasgow in May raised £855, with Community and Events Manager Abbie-Louise Thomas and Scotland's Outreach Officer Emma Gration leading a team of nine volunteers who collected from 7am to 7pm at the city's Central Station.

PAIR RAISE MORE THAN £8,000 AFTER SKYDIVE

Daredevils Joanne Thomas and Debbie Smith landed more than £8,000 for the Association from a sponsored skydive. They made their tandem jump from 10,000 feet over Norfolk in May. They decided to fundraise for Blesma after hearing about its work and its heritage.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Trustees' Annual & Strategic Report 2022

EVERY YEAR, THE ASSOCIATION MUST PUBLISH AN ANNUAL REPORT ALONGSIDE A SET OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS. BELOW IS AN ABRIDGED VERSION OF THE MOST RECENT REPORT

Blesma entered its 90th year in 2022 anticipating a challenging year as the country took time to recover from the Covid pandemic. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February had significant economic consequences that were made worse by considerable political and economic upheaval at home. The cost-of-living crisis had a major effect on households, while market uncertainty also impacted on investment performance.

Consequences for Blesma included an increase in the need for charitable support for its Members in a more difficult fundraising environment. Whilst the charity made a conscious decision to maintain existing levels of service, it will continue to closely scrutinise and prioritise its spending in order to meet its commitment to provide life-long support.

Our Blesma Support Officers, Outreach Officers and volunteers maintained close contact with our Members throughout the year, visiting in person whenever possible and increasing the number and scope of regional and online outreach events that kept Members in touch with each other.

Although the backlog from the pandemic continues to affect the delivery of statutory services, staff have been actively engaged with other agencies to overcome obstacles and help coordinate the delivery of support. The Association also took the decision to assist Members when energy prices rose significantly in the Autumn, offering all

Members a £200 grant. With the end of most Covid restrictions in March, Blesma was finally able to re-start a full activities programme at home and overseas. As well as skiing trips, sailing and cycling events, and fitness and lifestyle courses, Members travelled to Flanders for a battlefield tour.

Closer to home, others took part in family glamping events, Widows and Seniors Weeks, and a wide range of group activities across the UK. Our 90th anniversary was commemorated at Members' Weekend in June, and a special anniversary reception at the Royal Hospital Chelsea in October.

Security

Throughout 2022, Blesma's Support and Outreach Officers – supported by specialist head office staff – continued to deliver advice, assistance and welfare support to our 2,697 Members in the UK and abroad. In addition, more than 86 volunteers provided more than 800 days of additional support to Members and their families.

There were 9,774 contacts with Members during 2022, of which 950 were home visits and 111 were online consultations. Blesma awarded 1,003 welfare grants to 603 Members in 2022, providing support across a range of needs including powered and manual wheelchairs, mobility scooters and stairlifts. Feedback from Blesma's Support Officers indicated that casework during 2022 continued to follow a similar

theme to 2021 by becoming more complex, professionally demanding and time intensive. Where this was evident, Support Officers continued to coordinate with other providers in multi-disciplinary teams to ensure Members received the joined-up support they needed.

We continued to monitor developments in prosthetic provision. At an individual level, Blesma advocated directly for 106 Members who required support locally at their NHS Limb Centres. We continued to raise awareness of limb loss within the NHS, delivering four regional GP veterans awareness training sessions over the year.

Blesma's support to the Defence Recovery Capability was affected by Covid restrictions as visits by Members to Complex Prosthetics Assessment Clinics were suspended during the year. However, the Association helped 190 Members with attributable injuries access specialist clinical care via the NHS Veterans Trauma Network (VTN). Blesma was represented on the VTN programme board and was involved in 22 VTN multi-disciplinary teams which directly benefitted Members.

Blesma continued its close links with the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre at Stanford Hall. Although in-person visits were suspended, the Complex Prosthetic Assessment Clinics continued to run smoothly, accepting 10 Member referrals. Following the re-introduction of the successful osseointegration programme,

Lamin Manneh lost three limbs when he was caught in an IED blast serving in Afghanistan in 2010



Newsfeed



several Blesma Members completed their rehabilitation at Stanford Hall during the latter part of the year.

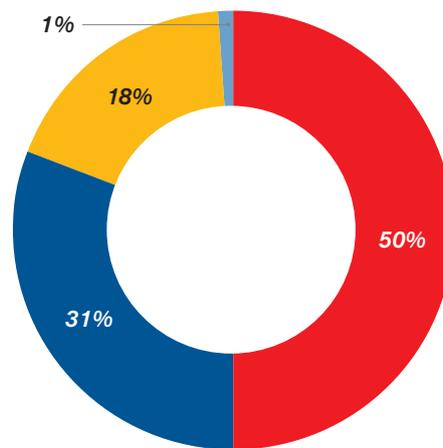
For those with Service attributable amputations, the Veterans' Prosthetics Panel continued to provide an excellent route for funding components in England. In 2022, Blesma achieved 370 successful advanced prosthetic component applications (95% success rate in submissions) for our Members, valued at £2,345,148. The Veterans' Prosthetics Panel and NHS England continued to support Blesma Member applications to replace out-of-warranty prosthetics through residual funds. Eligible Members in the devolved administrations had similar access to prosthetics through national care pathways, supported by Blesma.

Blesma's BSO (Prosthetics) continues as a member of the NHS England Prosthetic Service Review board. Blesma is also represented on the Direct Skeletal Fixation (Osseointegration) Policy Working Group.

NATIONWIDE SUPPORT

Blesma was grateful for the financial support provided by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT) scheme which helped fund activities in several Blesma regions. Of note was the success of the South West Photography Group which delivered a total of 100 activity sessions including 15 physical activities, 15 online craft activities, 70 photography workshops and a photography exhibition staged at the University of Plymouth. The AFCFT also facilitated a grant from the Office of Veterans' Affairs in support of veterans of recent conflicts.

INCOME



■ Donations & Grants	50%
■ Legacy	31%
■ Investment	18%
■ Other	1%

“At any one time, Blesma has some 30 applications underway that are awaiting either confirmation of service or eligibility criteria”

Blesma's membership enquiries and application process continued to benefit from the move to an online process, with 152 new Members joining the Association during the year. At any one time, Blesma has around 30 applications underway awaiting confirmation of service or eligibility criteria.

Blesma's Benefits and Social Care Advisor successfully resolved 75 benefit enquiries submitted via BSOs and a further 88 directly from Members. She also conducted at-home consultations with BSOs to advise and support Members with particularly complex cases.

BSOs continued to directly support Members who wished to challenge their War Pensions, Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Awards or DWP benefits. This also included representing them at hearings and tribunals. Blesma continued to engage with the DWP and delivery partners, highlighting issues affecting veterans. This included monitoring and publishing changes to existing policy which may affect Members.

RESEARCH

In 2022, Blesma and Anglia Ruskin University concluded a two-year research study into living with loss of use of limb, and in particular the effects on families. The project was generously funded and supported by the Forces in Mind Trust, who also allowed for further investigation into the experiences of female veterans and their families. The final report promises to shine a light on some key areas of need whilst proposing a practitioner's tool that will help inform and improve future clinical practice.



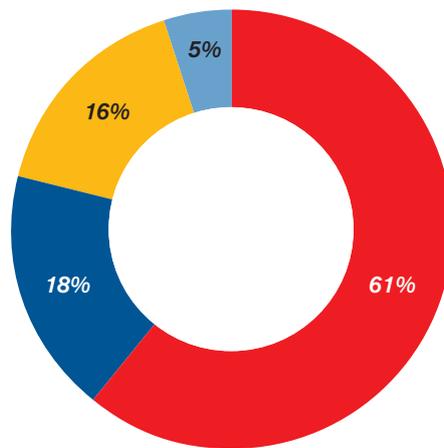
Blesma also applied for a £200,000 research grant from the Office for Veterans' Affairs through the Health Innovation Fund. If funded, this research will examine the benefits of using commercially available mobility devices to enhance the quality of life of users.

WORK WITH DEVOLVED GOVERNMENTS

Blesma continued to work with Social Security Scotland to help shape its new disability benefit system, specifically where it has impact on veterans. The Adult Disability Payment is the Scottish equivalent of the Personal Independence Payment. Staff have taken part in stakeholder events to help develop the claim process and help design the claim form. The Association has also inputted into the Scottish Government's Enhanced Administration and Compensation Recovery consultation process.

In Wales, Blesma continued to attend the Cross-Party Group for Armed Forces and maintained a strong relationship with the Welsh Government Armed Forces Team. The Association continued to highlight gaps in support for veterans and their families in Wales while supporting initiatives to improve service provision, reduce social isolation for veterans and improve prosthetics provision. BSO Wales and West collaborated directly with the new Veterans' Commissioner for Wales and now sits as Vice Chair of the Wales Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee (VAPC).

In Northern Ireland, the Association worked closely with the NI Veterans Support Office (NIVSO) to coordinate

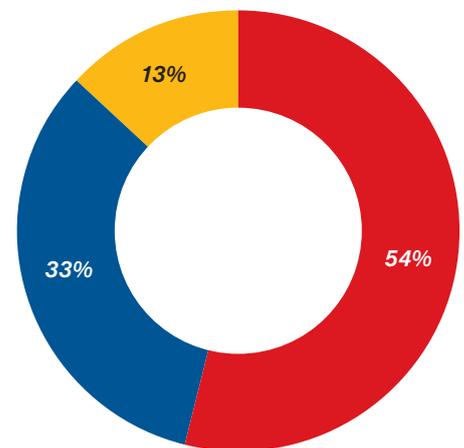


EXPENDITURE

Membership Services	61%
Activities	18%
Fundraising and Investment Management Fees	16%
Awareness & Representation	5%

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES EXPENDITURE

Advice, Support, Visits Engagement, Other	54%
Grants	33%
Overheads	13%



support and raise awareness of veterans' issues. Blesma also contributed to the success of six veterans' information roadshows hosted by the Veterans Commissioner. BSO (Prosthetics) and

BSO Scotland & Northern Ireland are members of the NI Armed Forces Liaison Forum and work with the Musgrave Park Limb Centre on issues affecting prosthetic provision in the province.

Newsfeed



Identity

Blesma's 90th year began under Covid restrictions with some events having to be cancelled. By March, these restrictions were eased, enabling a skiing trip to France to take place. This was the first overseas Blesma activity in two years.

The lifting of travel restrictions also meant that the twice-postponed Race Across America (RAAM) cycle event could take place in June. This event was probably the most challenging of any group activity that Blesma has organised, with Blesma's team of cyclists and support crew digging deep to overcome the loss of their captain after a bike crash and their team bus after a mechanical breakdown.

National activities were also able to take place throughout most of the year. Family glamping trips, Seniors and Widows Weeks, fitness and lifestyle camps, a surf week and a week-long photography event in Shetland all provided opportunities for Members and their families to re-connect.

We were able to return to our usual month of June for Members' Weekend

where 250 Members, family members and guests took part in a celebration and commemoration of Blesma's 90th anniversary. The event also included the first in-person Annual General Meeting since 2019, with some Members attending remotely. Once the formalities were over Members took part in a wide variety of games, workshops and displays.

The 90th anniversary commemorations continued with Blesma hosting a reception in the State Apartments of the Royal Hospital Chelsea. Members, Trustees and staff from across the Association hosted guests including individual donors and corporate supporters, representatives from the Armed Forces, government ministries, the NHS and other military charities to say thanks for making Blesma's work possible.

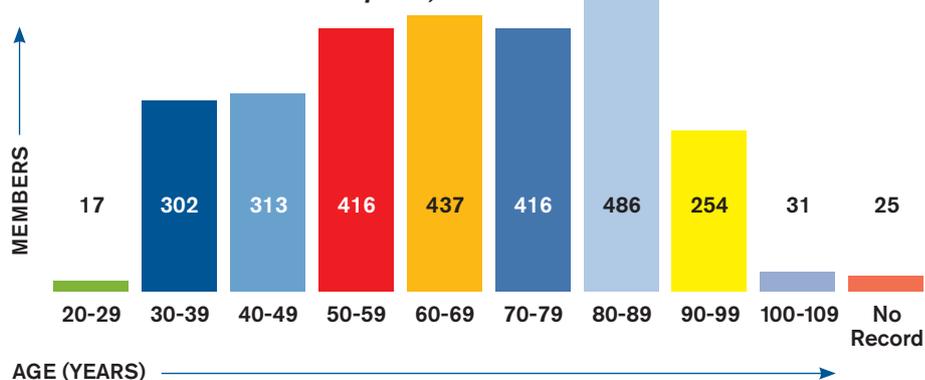
Other representational events in 2022 included the Belfast Military Tattoo, where Blesma was selected as the chosen military charity. Members were hugely touched as they received a standing ovation from the crowd. Remembrance events in November were well supported; Members attended the Cenotaph parade and conducted a wreath-laying ceremony at West Ham United Football Club's London Stadium.

Blesma's Venture Fund continued to support Members taking part in personal sporting challenges. Members competed in the Winter Paralympics and Invictus Games, while others were able to pursue ambitions in a wide variety of sports including polo, aerobatic flying, motorsports, archery, ice hockey and sailing. Mountaineering successes included Member Les Binns summiting Mount Everest, Andy Reid's successful expedition to Mount Kilimanjaro and Martin Hewitt summiting Mount Vinson in Antarctica in his attempt to complete the Adaptive Grand Slam.

The Making Generation R programme was able to return to face-to-face training and presentations in 2022. After running the programme for six years, the Association commissioned an external evaluation to

THE AGE OF BLESMA'S MEMBERS

Blesma has a total membership of 2,697





“Blesma awarded 1,003 welfare grants to 603 Members in 2022, providing support across a range of needs”

decide on its future. After an extensive review, the Association decided to continue delivering presentations to youth audiences for one more year, then to transition into a storytelling programme focusing on Members telling their story to audiences of their choice. This new programme is planned to launch in mid-2023 for a trial period of two years.

Connectivity

Blesma continued to maintain connectivity between Members through an expanding programme of social events and activities delivered regionally by our 10 Outreach Officers. This led to the successful delivery of 288 activities (46 virtual and 242 face to face) to 3,654 Members and their families in 2022. Online activities continued to link our regional networks with Members across the country and beyond. These included all manner of arts and craft activities, a drama project, health and wellbeing workshops, quizzes and get-togethers over home-cooked recipes. Face-to-face activities included a huge variety of days out such

as dry slope skiing and snowboarding, golf, target rifle and clay pigeon shooting, carriage driving, coarse fishing and sailing.

More widely, the Association continued to advocate on behalf of its Members with the Ministry of Defence, the Office for Veterans' Affairs and the Ministry of Health and Social Care. Our Independence and Wellbeing staff maintained close ties with both national and local agencies to deliver joined-up support, often through multi-disciplinary teams focused on individual cases. Blesma continued to develop its working relationship with Veterans UK by holding regular meetings with staff. This collaboration was strengthened in 2022 with Blesma being invited to participate in a Veterans UK communications review, a Lived Experience event and two training sessions at Norcross for Veterans UK staff delivered by Blesma BSOs to promote a better understanding of the issues faced by our Members. This will be supplemented in 2023 by further online sessions provided to Veterans UK Welfare Service staff.

During the year, the Association provided detailed feedback and advice on several

government consultation papers on health, disability, and the provision of care services. We continued to work closely with the Scottish Parliament on the Scottish Social Security Review and represented veterans in Wales through the Welsh Armed Forces Prosthetic Forum.

Blesma continued to be represented on the executive boards of Cobseo, the Confederation of Service Charities and Veterans Scotland, while collaborating with other charities supporting disabled veterans through the Disabled Veterans Charity Partnership with Help for Heroes and Blind Veterans UK. The Association also submitted a joint case with Help for Heroes to the Treasury for the restoration of the Veterans Mobility Fund, which previously used money raised through LIBOR fines to provide prosthetics and mobility equipment to veterans with attributable injuries.

In 2022, Blesma commissioned a membership survey to improve its understanding of Members in terms of numbers, lifestyles, work and family. Members were invited to describe how they had used Blesma's services and activities in order to establish what kinds of needs they might have going forward in terms of welfare support, activities and communications. The intention is to use this information to make recommendations on how Blesma should develop its strategy over the next five years. The survey received more than 400 responses, representing approximately 15% of the membership. These responses have been followed up with more detailed one-to-one interviews.

This is taken from the Trustees' Annual and Strategic Report 2022. You can read the full report and financial statements at www.blesma.org/news-media/annual-report



Words: Danny Buckland

You could be flying high after training programme

An inspiring scholarship scheme for disabled flyers is celebrating its 40th anniversary whilst two more Blesma Members have been selected for its prestigious programme. Founded as a living memorial to WWII hero Group Captain Sir Douglas Bader, the Flying Scholarships for the Disabled (FSDP) charity has helped more than 500 people fulfil their dream of getting airborne.

Between six and eight scholars are selected from more than 40 applicants for an intensive training programme each year. Blesma Member Alex Krol, a former Royal Marines Commando who suffered a spinal injury in a traffic accident, got his pilot's licence after winning a place in 2008.

When Alex applied, he felt defined by his injury and was without a job or a purpose. "I wanted a life-changing opportunity and the scholarship delivered that," said Alex. "With aptitude tests and interviews, and a final selection at RAF Cranwell, there was a real sense of achievement in being selected.

"Over the years it has benefitted me and other Blesma Members, and I hope that more people will give it a try. It opened my mind to what I could do and that's at the very heart of the programme. We are looking for people who will transform their lives through the training programme.

"One of this year's scholars, for example, is an amputee and has started walking his dogs and reducing his meds since getting selected, so the benefits have started even before the training has begun!"

FSDP scholars are paired up carefully with dedicated instructors for the three-week flight training programme. They receive up to 16 hours of flying, with some reaching solo standards before continuing with the training to get a pilot's licence.

"I got my pilot's licence and it kick-started a lot of things for me," said 41-year-old Alex, who is now focused on becoming a flight instructor. "Flying is my passion and I like to share that and how it can help change people's lives."

JIMMY HILL BRACES HIMSELF FOR EVEN BIGGER CHALLENGES

Former Royal Marines Commando James 'Jimmy' Hill now competes in gruelling triathlon races thanks to a carbon brace that was funded by Blesma. The 39 year old, who sustained battlefield injuries in Afghanistan, recently completed a sprint triathlon and has plans for a tougher version which involves a 1,500m swim, 40km bike ride and a 10km run.

"Triathlon was always something that I wanted to try when I was in the military, but I never seemed to have the time. Now I'm turning 40, I thought I'd give it a shot," said Jimmy, from Poole, Dorset. "Blesma was instrumental in funding the carbon brace for my leg which enables me to run."

Jimmy, a former Royal Marines Corporal, was hit five times in the leg by machine gun fire whilst serving in Afghanistan in 2013. He was left with a semi-paralysed 'dropped' foot and hip mobility issues.



James 'Jimmy' Hill has taken up triathlon

"From the knee down, I've got no sensory feeling or motor function, so my lower leg is basically 'floppy', which is where the brace comes in. It is an expensive bit of kit, so Blesma's help has been invaluable," said Jimmy, who runs the Pawseidon Canine Rehabilitation Centre in Dorset.

"The run part of the sprint triathlon was on gravel so it was a bit challenging, but it was great to complete and I've now got the hunger for longer distances, hopefully building up to a full Ironman one day."



Members and their families meet new commissioner

Blesma Members have been hailed for their positive insights in key focus groups that will influence future policies about physical and mental health, access to services, wellbeing and funding for veterans in Scotland.

At the beginning of the year, one group of veterans and another of Members' spouses, partners and Widows, met with the new Scottish Veterans Commissioner (SVC) Lieutenant Commander (Retired) Susie Hamilton, whose key role is to improve outcomes for veterans in Scotland.

Ms Hamilton, a former officer in the Marine Engineering Branch who saw operational service in the Adriatic and the Gulf, joined the Scottish Veterans

Residences charity when she retired from the Royal Navy and was appointed the Scottish Veterans Commissioner last July.

The meetings took place in two separate locations; the spouses, partners and



Widows met at the Black Watch Museum café near Perth, while the Members and other veterans met at the Veterans Community Hub near Wishaw. The discussions covered a range of topics around health and wellbeing led by the commissioner and her team.

"I knew Susie from a previous role, and when we met up at the launch of the Poppy Appeal in Edinburgh, I invited her to engage with Blesma Members," said Outreach Officer Scotland Emma Gratton, who organised the sessions. "She hasn't been in post very long, but I think this was a positive exercise for her. Susie was able to learn first-hand about the sort of challenges Members and their families face and, although she has no power to become involved in individual cases, it was clear that she will be a great champion for veterans.

"Both meetings were very worthwhile, and Members spoke about the care they had received, which made it clear that different areas support people in different ways," said Emma. "It was also clear that the support Blesma offers veterans is appreciated and valued by them."

Following the meetings, the Veterans Commissioner said: "I am grateful for Blesma's support in jointly facilitating the first of what I hope will be many focus groups with veterans and veterans' wives, partners, widows and children. I want to give a voice to lived experience in my work to make things better for the veterans' community across Scotland.

"I very much enjoyed meeting the Blesma Members who participated and I appreciated that they were open and frank about their experiences and expectations. That's what's needed and I really appreciate their willingness to share."

OP COURAGE LAUNCHES NEW AND IMPROVED SERVICE FOR VETERANS

Blesma is backing an NHS mental health specialist service and wellbeing programme that aims to support people struggling after military service.

Op COURAGE offers a range of support and treatment options that can ease the transition from military to civilian life and helps veterans access mental health care with Defence Medical Services. The scheme, which has helped more than

30,000 veterans since it was launched in 2017, is available to serving personnel due to leave the military as well as reservists, veterans and their families.

Its new, improved and streamlined service – developed by veterans for veterans – launched at the end of May with care provided by trained professionals who are from, or have experience working with, the Armed Forces community.

Op COURAGE can be accessed directly at regional hubs or via your GP or a military charity. Its mission is to connect veterans with specialist care, support and treatment for specific individual needs.

For more information on Op COURAGE please visit www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/armed-forces-community/mental-health/veterans-reservists



The new storytelling programme will build on the success of MGR

Words: Danny Buckland

Storytelling programme to launch

Blesma is launching a Storytelling and Wellbeing programme to build on the success of Making Generation R. The project, which is due to start in the autumn, will feature online and in-person workshops with professional storytellers. The Drive Project will deliver the workshops, which are designed to help Members and their families build confidence and promote good mental wellbeing.

“The workshops will provide Members with opportunities to connect with other Members to share experiences, learn from one another and be creative,” said Alice Knight-Driver, founder of the arts and training organisation that developed Making Generation R with Blesma. “The programme will also offer an opportunity to meet other local Blesma Members and make connections within local Blesma communities.”

The new programme will be open to all Members including Widows and Widowers, and Members who served in the UK Forces from other nationalities. Unlike Making Generation R, there won't be a public performance element to the programme, but instead Members will be able to decide how they wish to use the skills they learn.



Members taking part in MGR training

“Members will learn storytelling basics and will explore techniques they can use in their everyday lives,” added Alice. “They will learn how to use their voice, physicality and energy to build confidence and new forms of expression, and will be invited to share their personal stories.”

Members will be able to sign up to workshops that range from 90 minutes to a full day, with no long-term commitment required. Season 1 starts this autumn with online workshops open to Members across the UK and in-person workshops being held in the South West and West.

Six Members will take part in a workshop taster in July. The two-day, in-person event will feed into the Storytelling Programme. Email activities@blesma.org by Friday 30 June if you are interested in taking part. To register your interest for Season 1 of the workshops also email activities@blesma.org



“I just want to get on and live independently,” says Paul

Former naval diver Paul Foster is regaining his independence after Blesma helped him move from a cramped first-floor flat into a bungalow. The 72-year-old double amputee felt isolated in the flat but struggled to arrange suitable alternative accommodation.

“I virtually sat on the bed for 13 months because I couldn’t get out of the place. Blesma got me into a great bungalow and they also got me a wheelchair so I’m mobile again,” said Paul. “I am slowly getting used to it, becoming more confident and trying to live independently.”

BSO Wales and West Tom Hall and Outreach Officer Jason Suller were vital in dealing with Cardiff’s local authorities

to get Paul relocated and get him a new wheelchair. “I would still be sitting on my own without them. Tom and Jason have been brilliant. Nothing is too much trouble for them,” added Paul, who started his Naval career before his sixteenth birthday. Paul fell seriously ill with Covid last year, suffering strokes and pneumonia, and was in a coma for six weeks.

“I had to have both legs amputated above the knee, and Blesma has been a total godsend,” Paul said. “I’ve got this electric wheelchair and had adaptations at the bungalow so I can go out. I don’t want to be too much trouble, but I’m so grateful as I just want to get on with living independently.”

BRIAN CHENIER ANNOUNCED AS INTERIM DIRECTOR

BSO (PROSTHETICS) BRIAN CHENIER has become Interim Director Independence and Wellbeing (DIW). Brian, who has worked for the Association for more than a decade, has a wealth of experience in supporting Members and their families, and will be in the position for an initial six-month period.

The recruitment of a new Director Independence and Wellbeing has been paused pending the appointment of a new Chief Executive to replace Jon Bryant, who will leave Blesma in the summer (see the separate story on p07).

“This is an opportunity for me to take temporary care of the independence and wellbeing function and the great team that delivers it,” said Brian, whose role as BSO (Prosthetics) touches all aspects of independence and wellbeing. “My intention is to provide continuity and stability so that welfare services and support to the membership are not disrupted.”



Brian Chenier has been made Interim DIW

BLESMA HELPS NIK FUND WORK COURSE

NIK ELEY IS ON PATROL AGAIN, BUT this time the former soldier is a cyber warrior on the look-out for malicious hackers. The 54 year old, who served in the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment, is at the heart of a new security battle after graduating from an intense ‘ethical hackers’ learning course, part-funded by Blesma.

“IT is a passion of mine so it is great to be working in the industry,” he said.



“I now help companies and their customers stay safe by testing systems, encryption and passwords so that firms can build up their security if we find weaknesses.”

Ethical hacking is an accepted practice deployed by companies to safeguard their networks from cyber criminals. Nik, whose left leg was amputated below the knee four years ago after a service injury flared up, added: “The course was expensive but when Blesma heard about it they instantly offered to help. Completing the course and getting the job has been very rewarding.”

▶ BLESMA BRIEFING

Working towards a better future

AS AN EXPERT ON LIMB LOSS, BLESMA IS OFTEN ASKED TO GET INVOLVED IN RESEARCH PROJECTS. BSO (PROSTHETICS) BRIAN CHENIER EXPLAINS



Blesma is almost continually involved in a number of research projects. The Association aims to engage in research that will be of use to Members and the wider amputee and limb disabled community. We will often add our expertise to project groups and help design studies. Sometimes, we are asked to provide letters of support to help researchers secure funding, and occasionally we work with academics on research in which we then play an active role. Below are a few examples of our on-going work.

ENHANCING SOCKET FIT THROUGH DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Prosthetic limb technology has advanced significantly in recent years, with veterans playing a crucial role in pushing the boundaries of these devices. However, all users still need a well-fitting socket to fully benefit from these advances. This project aims to enhance the fit of sockets for lower limb amputees by collaborating with a group of prosthetic users to create an easy-to-use digital app (right). Users will report on their limb fit throughout the day and link these experiences to their daily activities. This information, along with images of residual limb shape changes, will inform the clinical fitting process about improved socket fit.



devices. The next step was to identify and interview Blesma Members who already had such devices to establish a few key themes. The next phase will be to identify volunteers who currently use a manual wheelchair and provide them with a device to trial. Active participation will be expected from these volunteers and video diaries of real-time use would be a useful outcome measure. Full details on how to participate are available by emailing Dr Thomas Kersey at thomas.kersey@aru.ac.uk

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY MOBILITY DEVICES

This one-year study is a collaboration between Blesma and Anglia Ruskin University. It will assess the use of assistive technology for mobility devices – specifically power add-ons for manual wheelchairs. The study is funded through the Veterans Health Innovation Fund from the Office for Veterans' Affairs. The first part of the study looked at what, if any, literature existed that measured the physical and social benefit of such

BONE HEALTH IN PEOPLE WITH LIMB LOSS

ADVANCE is a military-led study in collaboration with Imperial College London and King's College London looking into the long-term consequences and outcomes for people who have experienced blast injuries. The researchers have identified some interesting findings that could change the way bone health in amputees is treated. At the same time, a study taking place at Imperial College's Centre for



BLESMA AIMS TO ENGAGE IN RESEARCH THAT WILL BE OF USE TO MEMBERS AS WELL AS THE WIDER COMMUNITY



Decking makes all the difference

The sun is shining down on Steve Rigby and he's enjoying every second of it on his new garden decking that has been funded by a Blesma grant. The former Army PT instructor can now get out into the fresh air for more of the year as the revamp has made his garden more accessible.

"In the past, I could only get the sun in one part of the garden and then only during the summer months, so I had a word with my Support Officer, Vanessa Lucas, and she organised a grant for me," said Steve, 68, who lives near Burton upon Trent with his partner, Ann. "I can now get to the sunny part of the garden in the morning, and it has lifted my morale. The extra access is like a breath of fresh air, and being able to spend more time outdoors gives me that feeling of freedom and space."

Steve, who was paralysed at an Army gymnastics display, became a clinical psychologist lecturer at Leicester University and a corporate teacher after leaving the Army, and now chairs Nimbus Disability, a social enterprise that received a Queen's Award for Enterprise in 2022 (see separate story on p23).

"My coping method had always been to forget about my life in the Army and not associate with the military, but recently, through Blesma, I've been able to meet ex-Forces people and chat about the good (and bad!) old days. That has got me to a place of being content about the past rather than resenting it," says Steve. "Blesma has been very good for me and the decking will transform my life."



Blast Injury Studies has been exploring a range of protective equipment and blast mitigation strategies as well as looking at some of the long-term health consequences and implications of blast injuries.

As we age, our bones can show signs of osteopenia (deterioration in bone quality and strength) and osteoporosis (a marked deterioration in bone quality that brings with it a high risk of fracture). The data from ADVANCE indicates that some amputees are showing early signs of bone change in isolated regions rather than 'traditional' osteoporosis. Further research will use computer modelling to fully explore how an amputee's residual limbs can be loaded through exercise or with new socket designs to stave off the onset of osteoporosis. Early indications are that hormone replacement therapies may not be suitable as the issue is not due to hormonal changes.

"The main message is keep active," says Professor Alison McGregor from Imperial College London (above). "If you're worried, talk to Blesma or your GP but if people tell you they're going to put you on tablets to manage the changes, question if that is the right thing to do, and ask if the changes in your bone health are perhaps partly due to the fact that you're not loading through your leg in a traditional way."

"I think the main message is keep active," says Professor Alison McGregor (above)

“

IF PEOPLE TELL YOU THEY'RE GOING TO PUT YOU ON TABLETS, QUESTION IF THAT IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO

For advice on information on prosthetics, please get in touch with Brian, BSO (Prosthetics) on 07796 715908

Blesma teams up with Surewise Insurance

Blesma charity partners Surewise Insurance have donated four mobility scooters for Members as part of their link with the Association. The company, whose motto is 'Live Life Confidently', is based on 'building trust, care and fairness within the insurance sector'.

The scooters were delivered to Blesma's Corporate and Regional Fundraising Manager Chris Knight by Surewise's Business Development Director Stuart Bensusan. "We were impressed by Blesma and what it achieves for its Members and are delighted to be charity partners this year," said Stuart. "We want to help people live their lives with confidence as does



Stuart Bensusan from Surewise Insurance (left) and Blesma's Chris Knight

Blesma. We provide fair insurance at a fair price and our staff go that extra mile.

"Being a charity partner of Blesma's will be rewarding, and our staff will be staging fundraising activities during the year."

Surewise provides insurance for mobility scooters and wheelchairs as well as a range of products including carers' insurance, homes, buildings and contents, and self-storage facility cover.

"We are delighted to partner with Surewise and are looking forward to the year ahead," said Chris. "I'm excited to work with the team on the fundraising events they have planned. The mobility scooters that Surewise donates will make a significant difference to the lives of the Members who receive them. It's fantastic to have a partnership with such a great company where our values are so alike."

See an advert from Surewise below

Mobility Scooter Insurance

- ✓ Theft, Vandalism & Accidental Damage
- ✓ Third Party Liability & Legal Expenses
- ✓ Multiple Riders & No Age Limit
- ✓ No Hidden Fees & No Excess

For a quote call **0800 999 1122**
or visit **www.surewise.com**

Underwritten by

Insurance that changes lives


TrustScore 4.8/5 | +7,700 Reviews



Independence
with peace of mind

from just **£38.50/year***

*Pay monthly or annually





From left: Nimbus Disability Chair Steve Rigby, Deputy Lord-Lieutenant Tony Walker, Nimbus MD Martin Austin and Lord-Lieutenant Elizabeth Fothergill CBE

Clever Access Card wins the Award for Enterprise

A social enterprise company, which is run by disabled people for disabled people and is chaired by Member Steve Rigby, has been awarded a prestigious business accolade. Nimbus Disability has been awarded The Queen's Award for Enterprise for the development of its Access Card scheme which translates the card holder's access requirements into symbols to highlight the barriers they face.

When booking tickets online, for example, the card informs providers of the access requirements that individual needs at the venue, quickly and simply improving access for disabled people.

Nimbus Disability created the bespoke Access Card under the leadership of Board Chair Steve Rigby, who has been a Blesma Member for 15 years after breaking his neck in 1981 whilst serving in the Royal Army Physical Training Corps (RAPTC).

"We are incredibly proud that the Access Card has been recognised with this award," said Steve. "Our mission at Nimbus is to provide a digitised way of communicating

all access requirements, removing the need to call 'special' booking lines or answer personal and invasive questions over the phone.

"When I broke my neck, access for disabled people was a huge challenge, but thankfully times have changed. Just as I have benefitted from all the support and activities provided by Blesma, I know first-hand how the Access Card improves the lives and wellbeing of disabled people."



Nimbus Disability Chair Steve Rigby (left)

STRENGTHENING TIES WITH CADET FORCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

MEMBER BRYAN PHILLIPS HAS BEEN appointed the Honorary Vice President of 72 (Omagh) Squadron Royal Air Force Air Cadets. Bryan first met the cadets in 2020 as part of the Making Generation R programme when he shared his life story with them; from joining the Irish Guards in 2005 through to standing on an IED in Afghanistan in 2012.

"I am immensely proud to be associated with this squadron," said Bryan. "The cadets are shining examples who turn up each week and give 110 per cent. Since I have got to know them they have shown resilience and togetherness, coming out the other side after Covid stronger than before."

Bryan was appointed to his new role by His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Tyrone, Robert Scott OBE JP. During the event, Bryan presented the squadron with an



Bryan (left) and Robert Scott, His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Tyrone

engraved 'Cadets' Cadet' spitfire trophy, which will be presented at the end of the year to one cadet who will be chosen by their peers.

"Bryan was selected as Squadron Vice President for one clear reason; he is an exceptional example of resilience and determination in the face of overwhelming odds," said Squadron Leader Graham Dodds. "He is the ideal role model for the young people of our squadron. A meeting with Bryan never fails to lift our spirits and it is an honour to know him. He is an excellent ambassador both for Blesma and for our nation's Armed Forces."

Activities

FANCY FETTLING YOUR FITNESS IN FUERTEVENTURA, GOING GLAMPING WITH THE GRANDKIDS OR PLAYING GOLF IN PORTUGAL? BLESMA'S GOT 2023 SORTED WITH ACTIVITIES FOR EVERYONE

From scuba diving to a spot of skiing, from glamping to gaming, from Somerset to Spain, Blesma is giving Members the chance to try all sorts of activities this year. For free! **Apply now by emailing eventsca@blesma.org, or calling 020 8548 7097. Please note: entry requirements may be subject to change.**

FITNESS AND LIFESTYLE COURSE

Location: Fuerteventura, Spain

Date: 18-25 November

Application deadline: 01 August

A chance for a reset and a health change. Get moving together and experience all the magnificent beauty that Spain has to offer whilst trying out a host of new activities. Improve your diet and learn tips on how to balance your lifestyle. The week will have a possible variety

of activities ranging from yoga, pilates and cycling, to paddleboarding, coastering and golf.

Who can apply?

Any Member.

Requirements:

You must have three months' validity on your passport at the time of travel as well as an EHIC or GHIC Health Insurance Card.



COUPLES WEEKEND NORTH

Location: Manchester

Date: 22-25 September

Application deadline: 15 July

A new location for the Couples Weekend and a first in the Blesma calendar.

Members will be able to enjoy the rich industrial heritage that Manchester has to offer. Manchester has been voted one of the 10 friendliest cities in the world, making it the perfect location for Members to socialise with one another and take part in activities around the city.

Who can apply?

Any Member.

RIDE TO THE WALL

Location: Burton upon Trent

Date: 07 October

Application deadline: 01 July

Join the Blesma crew on the annual poignant and meaningful ride in memory of the fallen. The ride finishes at the National Memorial Arboretum.

Who can apply?

Any Member with their own motorcycle.

AUTUMN ACCESSIBLE GLAMPING WEEKEND

Location: Somerset

Date: 20-23 October

Application deadline: 01 July

Based at Wall Eden Farm, this accessible glamping site can be enjoyed by the whole family. Members will stay in accessible lodges that can sleep up to six and enjoy the beautiful surroundings as well as on-site activities from axe throwing to canoeing.

Who can apply?

Any Member with a family of between two and six people (i.e. the Member and

Discover the thrill of scuba diving

SCUBA DIVING EXPEDITION

Location: Egypt (TBC)

Date: October

Application deadline: 01 July

A great chance to enjoy some of the world's best scuba diving in warm water. You can dive for fun or work to pick up a number of diving qualifications. Instructors will take you through everything you need to know at a weekend training session in the UK prior to the trip. Complete novices are welcome, however, please note that you will have to attend and undertake the mandatory training.

Who can apply?

Anyone who can move up and down stairs on a 60ft dive boat with minimal assistance.

Requirements:

You must be able to enter Egypt, you must have six months' validity on your passport at the time of travel, and you must be triple vaccinated.

An underwater photograph showing two divers in clear blue water. They are positioned vertically, holding onto a thick rope that extends from the top of the frame down to the seabed. The seabed is rocky and covered with some green marine life. The lighting is bright, suggesting a shallow depth.

Apply now by emailing
eventsca1@blesma.org
or calling 020 8548 7097

Activities

Apply now by emailing
eventsca@blesma.org
or calling 020 8548 7097

Colorado Ski Spectacular

Location: Breckenridge, Colorado

Date: December (TBC)

Application deadline: 01 August

This annual event, organised by Disabled Sports USA, is one of the world's biggest and best ski spectaculars for all adaptive winter sports. The perfect week to have fun on the slopes. Mono ski, snowboarding, stand-up ski and 3 track are all available.

Who can apply?

Most injury types can be catered for. However, hotel rooms are not adapted and you must be able to use a bath.

Requirements:

You must be able to enter the USA (ESTA) and your passport must have at least six months' validity during the time of travel.

up to five others). Please note: whilst there is no minimum age to apply some activities are restricted to an age limit.

GOLF PORTUGAL

Location: Portugal

Date: 02-07 October

Application deadline: 01 July

Enjoy three rounds of golf in a stunning location in the Algarve. Golfers of all abilities are welcome, but you must have a handicap.

Who can apply?

This is not suitable for wheelchair users.

Requirements:

You must have three months' validity on your passport at the time of travel as well as an EHIC or GHIC Health Insurance Card.

SENIORS COUPLES CHRISTMAS

Location: Sinah Warren

Date: December (TBC)

Application deadline: 15 August

This will be the first event of its kind for the Association. Members over the age of 60 and their partners will enjoy a festive



break at a Warner hotel complete with carol singing, themed quizzes, cabaret, movies and panto.

Who can apply?

Any Member who is over the age of 60 with their spouse or partner.

CHRISTMAS MARKETS COUPLES WEEKEND

Location: Cologne, Germany

Date: 01-04 December

Application deadline: 15 August

A weekend break to get into the Christmas spirit. A chance to enjoy the historic city of Cologne and its world-famous Christmas

markets. Explore Angel Market, the oldest Christmas market in Cologne. Soak up the festivities, relax with your partner and enjoy the company of other Blesma couples.

Who can apply?

Any Member.

Requirements:

You must have six months' validity on your passport at the time of travel, and you must be triple vaccinated.

AUTUMN WIDOWS AND SENIORS WEEKS

Location: Alvaston Hall, Cheshire

Date: Widows Week 11-15 September

Seniors Week 18-22 September

Application deadline: 01 June

Based at one of the prestigious Warner hotels, the focus of the week will be on relaxing and socialising with gentle activities and sightseeing opportunities in and around Cheshire.

Who can apply?

Seniors Weeks are open to Members, spouses, and Widow(er)s over the age of 60. Widows Weeks are for Widows only.



Apply now by emailing
eventscal@blesma.org
or calling 020 8548 7097

Activities



EGX London

Location: Excel Centre, London

Date: 12 October

Application deadline: 01 July

Blesma is offering Members the opportunity to attend the EGX video gaming convention at the Excel Centre in London. EGX is one of the best known gaming events in the UK and is a huge celebration of all things gaming. The convention itself will run for four days this October, but the Association's activity will focus on one day, which may also include the chance to take part in some gaming.

Who can apply? Any Member.



Remembrance Weekend

Location: London

Date: 11-12 November

Application deadline: 15 July

The annual Blesma Remembrance Parade at the Cenotaph over Remembrance Weekend. One of the most poignant events in the Blesma calendar.

Who can apply?

Any Member.

Apply now by emailing
eventscal@blesma.org
or calling 020 8548 7097



WOULD YOU LIKE TO PUT ON AN ACTIVITY?

If so, we'd love to hear from you! The Activities Team is available to give you support in organising an activity and can explain exactly what you'll need to do. First, you will need to complete the Activities Proposal Application Form which is on the website, or you can contact aelocal@blesma.org

You will be able to discuss the things you'll need to consider about the activity and venue to ensure everything runs smoothly and that Members/Widows are able to enjoy themselves in a safe environment. For example: is the activity suitable for those with limited mobility? Are the venue and toilets accessible and wheelchair friendly?

Blesma will pay for the cost of hiring the venue, the activity itself, refreshments and, if appropriate, accommodation. Please get in touch with the Activities Team if you would like to learn more.





Pete talks about the bomb
blast that caused his severe
injuries at blesma.org



Iraq 20 Years on

“It was the best job in the world; technical, exciting and operational”

THE SECOND IRAQ WAR BEGAN IN MARCH 2003. TWO DECADES ON, PETE NORTON RECALLS THE EVENTS THAT CULMINATED IN HIM RECEIVING SEVERE INJURIES WHEN HE STEPPED ON AN IED, AND DISCUSSES WHAT LIFE HAS BEEN LIKE EVER SINCE

Pete Norton was severely injured by an IED in Iraq in 2005 while he was working in a coalition anti-terror and bomb disposal unit. He lost his left leg and left arm in the blast, while his right leg has recently been amputated above the knee. Pete was awarded the George Cross for his bravery following the blast, and because his actions also saved the lives of American troops he was awarded the FBI Star, the Bureau's equivalent of the Purple Heart. To mark the twentieth anniversary of the start of the second Iraq War, we caught up with Pete to discuss his memories of the incident, and what happened next...

Tell us about joining the Army...

My father and one of my grandfathers were in the Forces, so it was always my intention to join. I wanted to be a pilot but had been ruled out after being incorrectly diagnosed with asthma. My brother was in the Army, so I joined up in January 1983. I became an Ammunition Technician in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, which eventually became the Royal Logistic Corps. It was an interesting and technical trade that involved working with all the ammunition and explosives the Armed Forces had, as well as learning about bomb disposal and IEDs. My role was both technical

and tactical. I did seven tours of Northern Ireland, worked my way up to WO1 Conductor in the RLC, and commissioned in 2001.

You went on to dispose of bombs all over the world?

I was based in Germany for a long time but did tours all over the world, especially in Northern Ireland. I disposed of a lot of bombs there; car bombs, radio-controlled devices, the first mobile telephone bomb... There was a lot going on.

But Iraq took that up another level...

In Baghdad, I was second in command of a coalition unit called the Combined Explosive Exploitation Service. We investigated things like explosions, finds of bomb-making equipment, and shoot downs of helicopters to learn how the enemy was operating and how their weapons worked. It was the best job in the world; it was technical, exciting and operational. There was loads of adrenaline, and I was working with a great group of people.

But during this time, you were injured...

At the scene of one incident I stood on a pressure pad which had two 122mm artillery shells hidden underneath it. The explosion took my left leg off above the knee, my left arm off below the elbow, 80% of my right buttock, all of my right hamstring, and left me with all sorts of other injuries. I remember everything – I was conscious throughout. I remember flying through the air, I remember the heat...

Despite your life being in danger, your first thoughts weren't for yourself...

Our unit was funded by the US Navy, and there were British and Australian soldiers on my team as well as American guys from the FBI. The worst thing after the explosion for me was that my own team could be under threat. It was clearly a high threat area, and I didn't want them to get injured. I could see my guys coming forward to help me, but I told them to stop and briefed them about what I'd done. I strongly believed there were more IEDs in the area, and the next morning that was found to be true – there was another device about 10 metres away. So before they came in to give me first aid, I wanted to make sure they knew what was around, where I'd been and where was safe to tread.

What happened after that?

I was evacuated on a Black Hawk via an American base. I was put into an enforced coma for a few weeks and was given life-saving treatment, I was having operations almost every day. When I came out of the coma, I was in Selly Oak hospital in Birmingham.

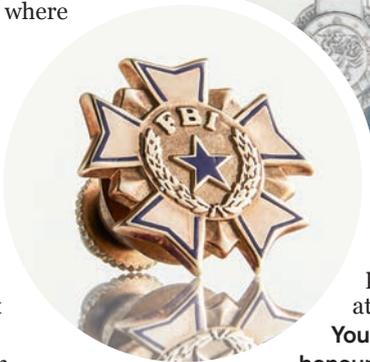
It was all very surreal and confusing. I spent a whole year in hospital being treated for my injuries, and that was a long and frustrating period of time. From there, I went to Headley Court for further rehab. This was 2007, and there weren't many people there at the time. Over the years, I've forgotten how many operations I've had – I lost count at about 50.

How did your injuries impact on your mental health?

It affects everything, not just for yourself but for your family members, too. It has been tough, like it has been for other people who have been through something similar but my wife, Kate, and my kids keep me going.

Through it all your career stayed on track...

I came out of Headley Court and carried on working, still in the field of defence intelligence and analysis. I did a master's degree and then stayed on in the Army as a member of the directing staff, lecturing in counter-IED work. I left the military in 2013, and since then I've done consulting work. Eighteen months ago, I started a PhD, looking at ballistic impacts, and



Pete's George Cross (above far left) and FBI Star (separate image)

last August I started a part-time role as a lecturer at Cranfield University.

You were awarded several honours for your bravery...

Being awarded the George Cross was a shock but also a great honour. It's not something you ever expect or think you deserve. I see it as a reflection of the whole team's effort during the incident, not just mine. Then, one day, I got a phone call from someone in Washington. They wanted to award me the FBI Star as I'd helped save the lives of several FBI agents during the incident.

How has Blesma helped you?

Blesma has been great over the years – the activities the Association puts on are superb. I've been on skiing trips and several photography trips – to Wales, Scotland and Iceland. It has also been very helpful with the practical stuff. I was one of first Armed Forces Compensation Scheme claimants, and the staff were so helpful with that. But just as important

is the welfare and the integration that the Association offers. Blesma is always there if you need support.

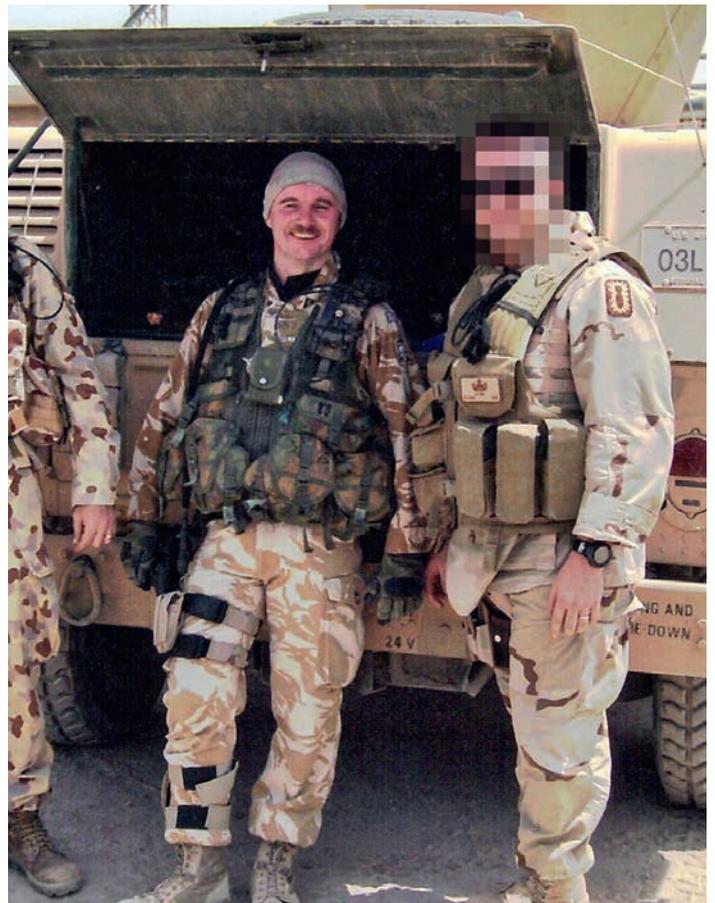
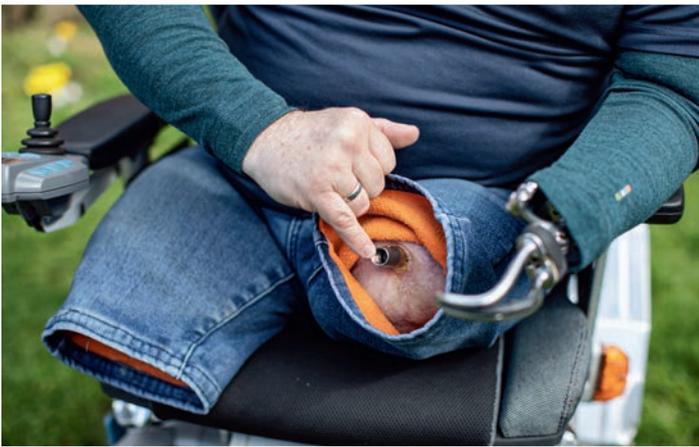
In the last few years you've had osseointegration surgery...

In 2019, I travelled to Sydney to have my right leg amputated above the knee and at the same time have osseointegration on both legs. Blesma provided funding so my wife could go out to Australia with me. The Association also helped with travel after that, when I was going backwards and forwards between home and Stanford Hall for further rehabilitation and to learn how to use the new prosthetics.

How are you now?

Unfortunately, I've had issues with the tissue of both residual limbs since that surgery and have had more operations to revise both stumps. I was doing alright until about a year ago when this issue came up. Once this is sorted, I'll hopefully get back up on my legs. I am very busy with work, my PhD and with my family, so there isn't much time for anything else!

“Being awarded the George Cross was a great honour. It's not something you expect”







LOFT LIVING

WHEN KEVIN BARNES LOST HIS LEG SEVERAL YEARS AGO
THE FORMER PIGEON FANCIER FANCIED FANCYING PIGEONS
AGAIN. THAT WAS WHEN BLESMA SWOOPED IN TO HELP



Kevin has had a life-long passion for pigeon racing



Kevin Barnes, 66, served in the Royal Navy for 17 years. His right leg was amputated two-and-a-half years ago as a result of circulation problems. A keen pigeon racer in his younger days, Kevin has recently rekindled his passion for the activity thanks to a grant from Blesma...

Tell us about your military career...

I grew up in Birkenhead and joined the Royal Navy in 1972. I was 15 years old. My grandfather, father and brothers had all served, and I needed a proper job. After my training, I worked on nuclear submarines and was then drafted to surface ships. I went all over the world – the West Indies, the USA and the Gulf. I liked the camaraderie and seeing different ways of living, but the poverty I saw often shocked me – I quickly realised how good I'd had it at home. And there were hairy situations at sea, sometimes I didn't know if I'd survive the night! It stood me in good stead for the rest of life, though. I left the Forces in 1989 managed pubs, then I worked around the country on mobile phone masts.

But you had some health issues?

Yes. I had to have my right leg amputated due to poor circulation. I noticed something was slowly going wrong, but two-and-a-half years ago my leg went really numb. I was rushed to hospital and was woken

up on the operating table; the doctors had been trying to sort the problem out but when that failed they needed my permission to amputate. I wasn't at all happy, as you can imagine! I asked to see a consultant I knew, but when I did speak to someone I trusted I was told I had blood clots through my leg and that my foot was dead because blood wasn't circulating. He said without the amputation, I was going to die.

But then it got even more serious...

For six weeks last year I was having heart attacks without even knowing about them. One day, I had pains in my back and my neighbour told me I didn't look well, so I called 111. They soon had an ambulance around. I was told I needed a triple heart bypass; I had veins that were 94% and 87% blocked. Getting veins from my leg proved too difficult at first, and I was in hospital for 16 days before the surgeon decided to clean the veins out by drilling them.

How has your rehab been?

It's been alright. I feel very lucky not to have had the experience that some poor lads and lasses have had – standing on an IED. With the help of the NHS, Blesma and the British Legion I've got through it. I've needed to stay positive. I do get blisters and various other problems with my stump, but I recently got a new prosthetic ankle which has helped.

How did you get involved with Blesma?

I was visited by my Support Officer while I was still in hospital – just a couple of days after the amputation.



HOW TO SOAR IN THE PIGEON RACING WORLD

Pigeon racers don't just rely on a wing and a prayer. Here are Kevin's tips for homing in on success

BRING IT HOME

The first, extremely logical step to developing a good homing pigeon is to give it a pleasant home. "If you breed a pigeon at home the bird has it instilled in its brain that this is where it lives," says Kevin. "That's where it gets fed, where it feels safe. It gets used to me, it knows that I am the one who feeds it, the one who cleans it, picks it up, talks to it. As it matures, it will have a mate there, it's got everything it needs in that loft. It's home. So when you let it out, it will go to exercise and fly, but it will always come back."

PUT A RING ON IT

Every homer needs its own ID. "They've all got their own individual aluminium rings that you put on them, each one is unique



and numbered," says Kevin. "You ring them when they're between five and seven days old, and the ring won't come off. The number on the ring is on the system of the Royal Pigeon Racing Association, so if a pigeon does get lost whoever finds it can call up and get it back to the right place."

START THE TRAINING

Once a pigeon is well settled and ringed, it's time to get training. "You take them five miles away, then 10, 15, 20, 40 and so on,"

says Kevin. "You let them out of the basket, and by the time you get home they'll usually already be there. I've got about 27 going out at the moment."

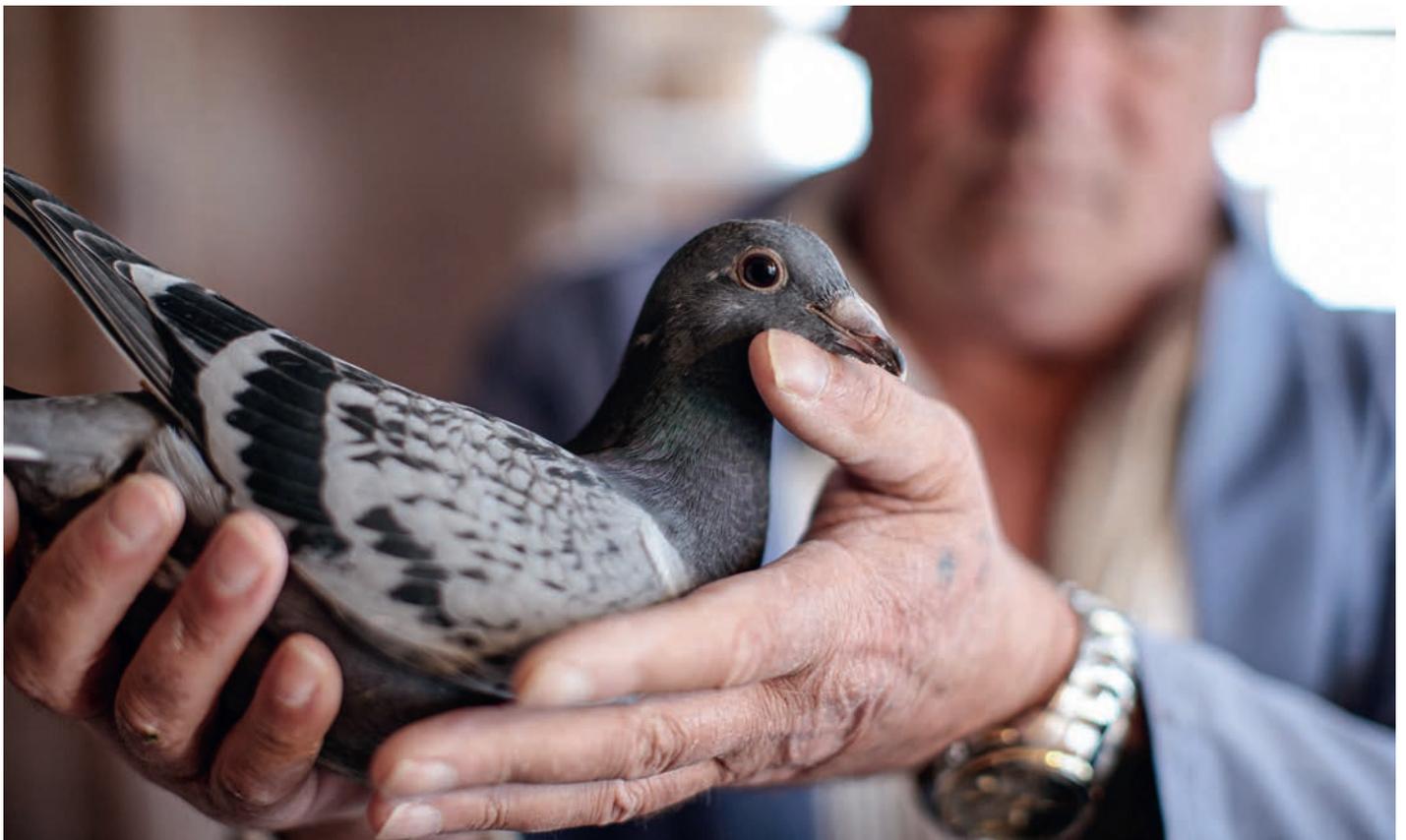
PEDIGREE, FITNESS AND NUTRITION

All three are key to a good racer. Like racehorses, good pigeons have a pedigree and histories that owners can study in an attempt to breed the best birds. "My birds have got ancestors that have raced to the UK from Marseilles, Barcelona, all over," says Kevin. "You also need to feed them the right type of food and give them the right type and amount of training. You can see when they are in good condition. If a pigeon seems happy in the loft and is full of itself, that's a good time to send it off to a race."

RACE DAY

Pigeons are transported in special panniers to the race on a lorry. "At the start point they are put through an automatic clocking system which logs them on a computer," says Kevin. "The race organisers wait for the right weather, and then they are released. You're waiting at home to see when they come in. We have sensors that automatically register the ring on their legs, then the time and speed of your pigeon is worked out and the winner is declared."







We had a chat and he said to give him a call if there was ever anything I needed. He asked what I'd like to do when I got out, and I told him I liked the idea of starting to race pigeons again. When I got a council bungalow, Blesma sorted me out with the shell for the pigeon loft as well as for an extension to put all the bird feed in. The Association has been fantastic.

How did you originally get into pigeon racing?

As a young kid, people had pigeons on our street and they'd let us have a look at them. I started keeping my own at the end of my naval career. When I got married we bought a house and there was a pigeon loft in the garden. I said to my wife: 'You look at the house if you like, but I'm already happy.'

How has getting back into the pastime helped you?

If I didn't have my pigeons, I don't know if I'd have a reason to get up in the mornings. I live alone and the birds are something to look after, something to be responsible for. They need me for their care and cleanliness. There's the breeding, the feeding, the training... it takes up a lot of time. I sometimes wonder what I would be doing without this. Would I be lying

in bed, feeling sorry for myself? It doesn't matter if it's pouring down outside, I have to sort the birds out. I've got the loft so clean and organised, it's brilliant.

What do you love most about it?

I've joined a club in Plymouth that has 30 members. You really get to know your pigeons and notice small differences in them. You learn which ones to pick for races, and the training is satisfying. What the birds can achieve is amazing. You build up to long races – the furthest I can race this year is from Barcelona.

That's 680 miles! They go out on a transporter and can fly back in a couple of days. I've raced before from 548 miles away – they were let go in the morning, and one got home at 7.30am the next day! Imagine taking all the road signs away and a person trying to do that.

What are your hopes for your birds this year?

I've got about 70 pigeons, including some young ones. I've bought some and I've bred some; it's nice to see them coming through. I'm hoping we don't have any problems like last year when hawks were killing a lot of them. I've got some club races coming up in Devon, so I'm really looking forward to those.

Blesma has helped Kevin out with a grant for his pigeon loft. He now has more than 70 birds

“IF I DIDN'T HAVE MY PIGEONS, I DON'T KNOW IF I'D HAVE A REASON TO GET UP IN THE MORNINGS. THEY NEED ME FOR THEIR CARE”

“FOR ME, THIS IS A SMASH AND GRAB!”

WHEN GREGG STEVENSON NARROWLY MISSED OUT ON SELECTION FOR RIO IN 2016 HE THOUGHT HIS PARALYMPIC DREAM WAS OVER. THEN, SIX YEARS LATER, HE GOT A CALL FROM TWO-TIME GOLD MEDALLIST LAUREN ROWLES...





Words: Nick Moore Photography: Anna Van de Braak for British Rowing, Andy Bate



Gregg training with rowing partner; double Paralympic gold medal winner Lauren Rowles

Take it from a former Commando: elite rowing training is utterly brutal. “I’ve learned the hard way,” says Gregg Stevenson, a former member of 59

Commando Squadron Royal Engineers who lost both his legs in an IED blast in Afghanistan in 2009. “There is something spiritual about rowing because you have to work extremely hard but be graceful at the same time. It’s that famous swan analogy: giving it everything you’ve got underwater, but on the top you’re serene. Any wobble takes speed off the boat. You may be the fittest person around, but someone else who keeps still and lets the boat do some of the work can go faster than you. I used to hit it too hard. I was the fastest on the indoor rower, but couldn’t translate it to the water. Now, I’m learning that with patience comes speed. It’s something I’ve come to love about it; learning to do it well. It’s very rhythmical, it’s almost like meditation.”

Gregg is training full time in a bid to row for Team GB at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games alongside rowing partner Lauren Rowles, who is already a legend in para rowing circles for her gold medals at Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020.

Gregg’s trajectory reflects that of many Blesma Members. He was a six-foot-six, super-fit soldier who loved being outdoors with his Devon-based unit. “When I joined I couldn’t believe my luck, training on Devon’s beaches,” he says. But deployment in March 2009 would change his life.

“Mine is the routine story – I was on a regular foot patrol in Afghanistan, coming under sporadic gunfire. We pushed into a building to try to get some elevation,” says Gregg. “I went into the building first with the metal detector, but the machine was going crazy and we were under immense pressure to get inside. I detonated an IED – it all happened very quickly.

“WITH PATIENCE COMES SPEED. IT’S SOMETHING I’VE LEARNED TO LOVE ABOUT IT; IT’S RHYTHMICAL, ALMOST LIKE MEDITATION”

“I was thrown through the air; it was like a fairground ride sensation. I felt a pain in my legs like a scolding and had the feeling that I’d been punched in the face. I was disorientated, my ears were ringing, and I had sand in my mouth. When I started hearing voices, I realised that I had significant injuries.

“I was flown back to Bastion and was being operated on within 40 minutes. I was in Selly Oak less than 48 hours later for the more long-term operations; making the stumps the right length. I had a significant infection which really drained me, and they had to take one leg off above the knee, but rehab was fine. I felt grateful that I was still here, and took well to the gym and physio, getting stronger and walking.

“Later on, I struggled. I wanted to stay in the military, but I knew I didn’t want an admin role. I lost motivation to come to terms with my disability. I drank a bit too much and didn’t eat well. I put on weight. It ground down my mental health and I was discharged in 2012.”

Two things turned things around for Gregg: a job at Preston’s Limb Centre and rowing. “I knew I needed to do the right things; get outdoors, exercise, eat better, sleep well,” he says. “The job was my saving grace. I did PT courses and got

“I’ve really come to love this sport,” Gregg says of rowing. He has the 2024 Paralympics in his sights





Gregg, photographed at home several years ago with his wife Melanie and their two sons



Gregg and Lauren train together twice a day, three days a week

“IT’S ALRIGHT SAYING WE’RE GOOD, BUT WE NEED TO PROVE IT. THIS FEELS LIKE UNFINISHED BUSINESS”

super-motivated to learn about weight loss and mental health to help myself and others. I had a purpose, I was training again, and started a family too, which was another reason to get healthy.”

Meanwhile, after getting an email, Gregg applied to row at the Invictus Games. “I was into rowing a little bit before my injury, but only on machines,” he says. “In the lead-up to the Commando course, I’d row when I wanted a break from running and load carrying. My technique was probably horrific, but I liked it; it was savage. When I did the Invictus try-out my scores in the 2000m row, which is a standard test, were very good, and I was told I could probably qualify for the GB Paralympics team. So I went down that route instead. It was a great opportunity.”

But Gregg didn’t quite make the cut. He battled for a seat in the Rio 2016 boat but narrowly lost out. “With that, I thought the curtain had fallen on that ambition, and I stepped away from the sport,” he says.

Gregg started doing some cross-country skiing and entered academia – studying for a scholarship in sports coaching and exercise for disabled veterans through the Open University, as well as continuing to work at the Limb Centre. He is currently studying for a master’s in psychology, and

working for the veterans’ mental health service Op Courage (see p17).

“Studying started a fire in me, I wanted to show I could do it,” he says. “At the Limb Centre I was seeing more amputee veterans struggling with weight issues, alcohol, poor sleep, high medication rates, not leaving the house – just like me seven years earlier. I got interested in pushing into that more. I felt like I had something to give and that I could back it up.”

ROWLES ROWS FOR GOLD (AGAIN)

He continues to progress in the field, but decided to pause his career after getting a phone call from Lauren Rowles last year. “She wanted to see if I’d partner with her in what would be her third Paralympics and, potentially, her third gold medal. I knew by the nature of that phone call that she was taking me seriously. She knows I am competitive.”

The pair now row in a male-female competition called the trunk arms mixed double sculls. “I like rowing in a team, and it does feel like unfinished business,” says Gregg. He trains two days a week at home, and travels to the famous Redgrave Pinsent Rowing Lake in Caversham, the home of UK rowing, to row with Lauren for the other three days. “Lauren is going

for her third Paralympics gold, whereas for me it is more of a smash and grab. Can I pull it off?” he says. “But we train hard. It can be two rows a day plus weights. We are all business, and I enjoy seeing how much my fitness and skill levels are coming on. This will be our regime until Paris, with lots of competitions in between. The key one is the World Championships in September. The top five boats from that get to the Paras. It’s alright saying we’re good, but now we need to prove it.”

Blesma has been invaluable along the way. “I joined while I was at Headley Court, and weeks later I was fishing with the Association in Colorado,” says Gregg. “Blesma is great for family support, and it really helped me when I was having a dip, I needed positive stories from people similar to me. Blesma now helps with my travel and accommodation when I’m training. That support has been incredible and shows how much they believe in me.”

Gregg has come a long way from the streets of Lancashire, where he grew up “with an inkling I’d always join the Army.” Now, his life is all about patience and progress. “Listening to Lauren, who has been here before and won two gold medals, has made a big difference. I’ve really come to love this sport,” he says.

CARING AND COPING:

LIVING WITH THE LOSS OF USE OF LIMB

AFTER TWO YEARS OF RESEARCH, THE FINDINGS OF AN IN-DEPTH STUDY INTO THE LIVES OF MEMBERS WITH LOSS OF USE OF LIMB HAVE NOW BEEN PUBLISHED. SO WHAT HAS IT DISCOVERED?

Uncertainty can be corrosive. It allows doubt, anxiety and stress to burden even periods of calm, and the negative impact becomes even greater when living with limb loss or the loss of use of a limb. But groundbreaking research from Blesma is illuminating a pathway for Members and their families to avoid the darkness that descends when uncertainty swirls around aspects of work, home and personal life.

The Caring and Coping research, which first studied the effects of limb loss and has more recently turned its attention to the loss of use of limb, has resulted in new techniques and methods for Members and their loved ones to address issues before they become harmful. The research, commissioned by Blesma and conducted by the Veterans & Families Institute for Military Social Research at Anglia Ruskin University, has drawn findings from speaking to veterans and their families about the issues – big and small – that cause discomfort and promote feelings of unease.

Having the space and security to talk about concerns and

fears that are otherwise bottled up is one of the prime conclusions from the study, and Blesma is already taking action to allow Members to feel more comfortable raising concerns and be better able to get the emotional and practical help they need to neutralise them.

“The Members who took part have contributed to vital research that is going to be put to great use,” says Associate Professor Hilary Engward, who leads the Anglia Ruskin team. “The findings will also be a huge help to healthcare and support services; it is fair to say that Members are playing a significant role in advancing everyone’s understanding.”

Caring and Coping: Living with the Loss of Use of Limb, which was funded by the Forces in Mind Trust, has now been completed and its recommendations are already influencing Blesma practice.

“We are initiating some training based on the key themes of the report, which focuses on what uncertainty means, how to manage it and how to better equip our Support Officers with the skills and knowledge they need to initiate and have what might be difficult conversations,” says Brian Chenier, Interim Director



**HILARY
ENGWARD**
Associate
Professor at Anglia
Ruskin University



**BRIAN
CHENIER**
Interim Director
Independence
and Wellbeing

Andy was injured in a motorbike accident when he was 22 years old



ANDY JEPSON

FORMER RAF DRIVER ANDY BELIEVES THE MENTALITY OF VETERANS WHO STRUGGLE TO ASK FOR HELP NEEDS TO BE BETTER UNDERSTOOD

Member Andy Jepson believes the research will help Blesma and the NHS services to get a greater understanding of how living with the loss of use of limb can impact lives beyond healthcare.

The 45-year-old former Royal Air Force mechanical transport driver, who lost the use of his right arm after a motorbike accident when he was 22 years old, says the knowledge will help improve how care and support can be focused on both an individual's needs as well as those of their wider family.

"One of the great things about the research is that Hilary interviewed my mum and asked how she was and how she coped," says Andy. "She has had an awful lot to deal with over the years, and it is important to recognise that 'family' doesn't just mean wife, husband or children. I live alone and she has

always been there for me, but she is 71 years old and lives four hours away. She can't just jump on a train, so she has to sometimes deal with me off-loading about things that are happening because I can't share that with just anyone."

Andy, who lives in Gloucestershire, suffered severe nerve damage in the motorbike crash and was medically discharged from the RAF three years later. He felt that he went from excellent Forces' medical care and support to patchy NHS provision.

"The RAF medics and the team at Headley Court were fantastic. There was mental health support available, but I felt that if I admitted that I was struggling I would never get back into uniform, so it was something I didn't deal with until almost 15 years later, when I finally had a breakdown and admitted I needed help. It's important there is more knowledge

and understanding across healthcare about the mentality of veterans who struggle to ask for help. We tend to endure pain for months before raising the issue," Andy adds. "There is also a lot of anxiety, PTSD and depression that goes unmentioned, so I would like to see NHS services become more aware and better able to connect with veterans."

"I'm not asking for special treatment for veterans; just a greater awareness of our specific challenges, and I hope this research helps."

Andy, who now works as an IT service delivery manager and is a volunteer with the Air Cadets, adds: "I do have anxiety about my injuries. I have good blood flow to my paralysed arm at the moment. However, I suffer with constant pain and have to compensate with the rest of my body to do things. But I have no idea what might happen physically in the future and how it might affect me."

"I also experience depression, more so when the anniversary of my accident comes around, because it's a reminder that I lost my dream job, left a way of life that I loved and became disabled. I'm already anxious about this and have been over-thinking things because this July, I will have been disabled longer than I was not. I just don't know how I will feel when I wake up on the day."

"But I was very happy to help out and take part in the research. I just hope that my input, and that from other Blesma Members, will go some way to helping improve the prospects of injured veterans."



“WE ARE INITIATING SOME TRAINING BASED ON THE KEY THEMES OF THE REPORT, WHICH FOCUS ON WHAT UNCERTAINTY MEANS, HOW TO MANAGE IT AND HOW TO BETTER EQUIP OUR SUPPORT OFFICERS WITH THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE TO HAVE WHAT MIGHT ULTIMATELY BE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS”

Brian Chenier, Interim Director Independence & Wellbeing



Independence and Wellbeing. “We want to be able to provide that safe space to start those conversations with Members and break down the stigma and taboos that exist around some topics.

“The research has clearly shown that people living with loss of use of limb experience uncertainty but might struggle to raise concerns with their family or Blesma, so we are going to train our Support Officers to make the first move and take those conversations into event planning to try to mitigate the negative impact of that uncertainty.”

A lack of certainty, of course, means different things to different people depending on their circumstances, but the research has helped identify the core elements and stages of uncertainty, which will make it easier for Members to talk about their individual needs and develop bespoke strategies. The researchers were able to build a matrix of different levels of uncertainty, their characteristics and examples of their real life influences on Members and their families. They ranged from suffering short-term symptoms such as colds, flu, and bladder or bowel control issues through episodes of fatigue, mental health issues and incapacity to unpredictable deterioration caused by aging, chronic illness or reduced self-care capacity.

UNDERSTANDING UNCERTAINTY

For each level, general questions and prompts have been developed to gain more understanding of what uncertainty means to people, help build a clearer picture of how issues affect their future and how the Member, their family and Blesma can respond to sudden changes and what options are available.

“We can work together to look at what uncertainty means in different circumstances. For example, you might rely on a mobility aid but feel concerned about what might happen if it breaks down, or how you might cope if childcare or work arrangements are disrupted by an illness,” adds Brian. “Knowing that you might have to deal with something but not knowing when, or how you might cope, can unsettle everyday life. But by understanding where problems might occur, we can work to create back-up plans that reduce the uncertainty – and the anxiety it causes.

“What we have learned from this research is that it is good to plan ahead for those days where life might not go as we had hoped or expected.”

The areas in which concerns can build up include finances, intimate care, childcare, the ability to attend

“MEMBERS HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO VITAL RESEARCH THAT WILL BE PUT TO GREAT USE. THE FINDINGS WILL BE A HELP TO HEALTHCARE AND SUPPORT SERVICES”



or function at work, and the availability of either mobility aids or transport. Members strive to live independent lives and contribute to society, and with that comes a very real reluctance to ask for help or raise concerns.

“The Support Officers are here to help our Members live independent and fulfilling lives, and to be there for our Members when events take place that mean they cannot be as independent or as fulfilled as they might want to be. So, this is about discussing and preparing for those occasions when uncertainty might be very real,” said Brian. “It is a really significant element of their lives.”

Hilary Engward adds: “This report opens up the doors for us to think ahead about how we might plan for uncertainty. There are problems people often don’t want to think about; we all find it easy to push future issues away and deal with the day to day. But we now have a way of addressing this and asking questions in a safe space to create plans to reduce uncertainty.

“We can have those conversations and develop ways to approach them that are safe, inclusive and positive.”

The report has potential as a teaching aid for future generations of healthcare workers to empower them to understand the impact of living with the loss of use of limb. Meanwhile, a course has been organised for September for medical students at Anglia Ruskin University, during which they will also meet a panel of Blesma Members to get vital, first-hand testimony.

The whole report can be viewed at www.blesma.org

“The research shows that people living with loss of use of limb experience uncertainty but might struggle to raise concerns with their family or Blesma,” says Brian Chenier

“I WAS RUNNING FOR THE WHOLE OF UKRAINE”

THE WAR IN UKRAINE IS RESULTING IN SOLDIERS LIKE ROMAN KASHPUR, AS WELL AS MANY CIVILIANS, SUFFERING LIFE-CHANGING INJURIES. BLESMA IS USING ITS WEALTH OF KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE TO HELP

Every year, the London Marathon brings people together from all across the world. This year, more than 48,000 runners from 152 nations crossed the finishing line on The Mall. The race is the perfect display of human endeavour and fortitude, and somewhere amongst the tens of thousands of people who ran, pushed and walked their way around the iconic 26.2-mile course this April was Ukrainian amputee, veteran Roman Kashpur.

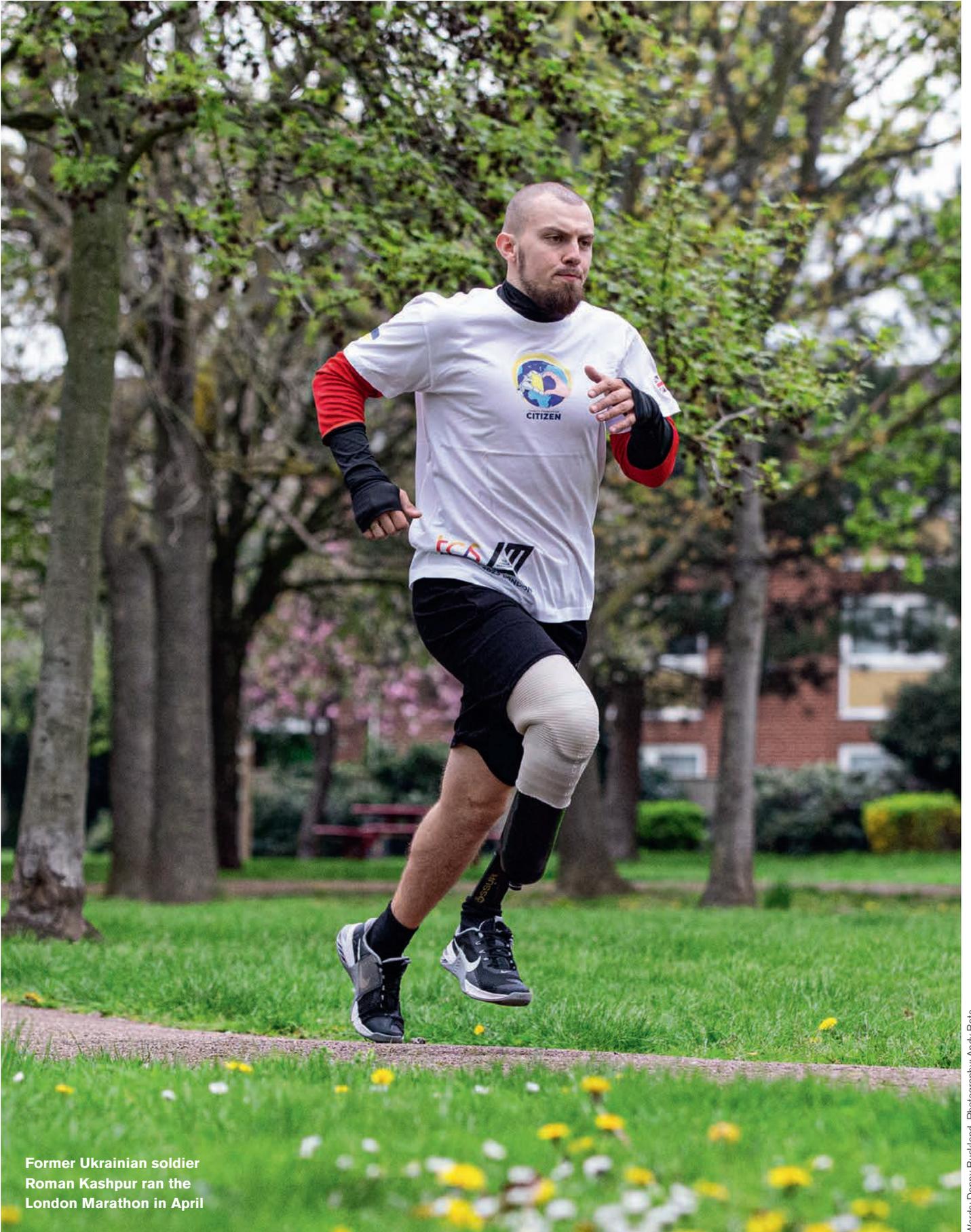
The 26-year-old landmine victim finished the race in just under six hours, all the while flying the flag for his country to raise awareness of the plight of up to 10,000 limbless countrymen and women; all victims of the struggle to repel the Russian invasion. Ukraine is dealing with a catastrophe on multiple fronts and, with the number of its limbless service personnel

continuing to rise, the country desperately needs practical assistance to care for its injured soldiers and civilians, as well as support for its military challenges.

The nation is struggling to cope with the growing number of amputees as it lacks the necessary facilities to manufacture prosthetics, the skilled specialists to make and fit them, and the lived experience that helps with rehabilitation and a return to independent living.

The world is responding and Blesma, with a bank of knowledge and expertise that has been built up since WWI, is advising the Ukrainians as they enhance their capacity to assist those who have been injured.

The need is clear. The *Without Limits* mechanical prosthetics clinic in the capital Kyiv is seeing up to 20 patients a day, while there is an acute shortage of prosthetists and physiotherapists. The clinic has teamed up with Open Bionics, which is working from



Former Ukrainian soldier Roman Kashpur ran the London Marathon in April

Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Andy Bate



“Losing a leg is obviously not good, but it is part of what we have to do to defend our country,” says Roman

plaster casts taken from injured Ukrainian soldiers, to create 3D printed bionic arms packed with sensors at its Bristol factory. Former Outreach Officer Darren Fuller, who lost part of his lower right arm while serving in Afghanistan in 2008, became the first veteran fitted with the company’s Hero Arm in 2020.

“It is absolutely right that Blesma should look to use its hard-won knowledge to assist the Ukrainians as they deal with the military and civilian casualties of the on-going war,” says Blesma Chief Executive Jon Bryant. “We have established contact with a number of organisations supporting those who have been injured, provided advice on the sort of holistic support we deliver and linked them with other experts in the field. Roman himself is an outstanding ambassador for those injured in the fighting and

“IT IS RIGHT THAT BLESMA LOOKS TO USE ITS HARD-WON KNOWLEDGE TO ASSIST THE UKRAINIANS”

has shown us just what can be achieved by a determined veteran with a mission.”

International collaboration will continue to support Ukraine through the conflict and into the future as it one day rebuilds its infrastructure and its people. The task will be immense, and it has been estimated that it will take at least a decade just to clear the country of landmines once the fighting stops.

For Roman Kashpur, an ambassador for The Citizen Charity Foundation of Ukraine, the marathon was a poignant moment of both personal and national pride as he finished the event with a Ukrainian flag signed by the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Valerii Zaluzhnyi.

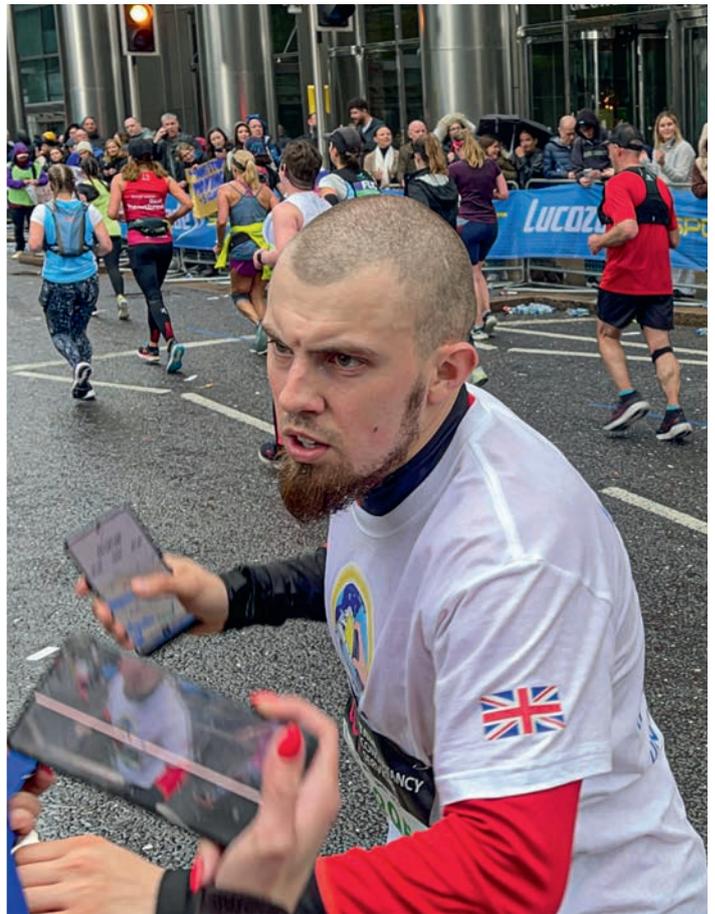
“For me, it’s a mission to help the world know more about my countrymen and women at sporting events on a global scale so that they can admire our unbreakable spirit,” says Roman.

Olena Schmidt, vice president of the Foundation and head of its *Cyborgs* programme which helps amputee veterans, adds: “We want the soldiers who have lost limbs to have the opportunity of a full and independent life. We need to help them with physical items such as wheelchairs, prosthetics and specialist equipment, but we also need to provide psychological and emotional support.

“We hope Roman’s efforts will raise awareness and help raise funds for people who are making incredible sacrifices to protect our country.”



Roman ahead of the race with his wife Yulia



Roman's story

Former frontline soldier Roman Kashpur, whose right leg was shattered when he stepped on a landmine, ran the TCS London Marathon to raise both funds for fellow amputees and awareness of the thousands of Ukrainian service personnel and civilians who have lost limbs since the Russian invasion. The father of two, who was 19 years old and serving in the 74th Separate Reconnaissance Battalion when he was injured, is now an ambassador for The Citizen Charity Foundation of Ukraine.

How was the London Marathon experience for you?

It was an honour to be in the race, but it was also a big challenge. I was kept going by thinking about everybody who has helped me to become who I am – that is my family, my combat comrades and my fallen friends. I was running for the whole of Ukraine as well as for myself.

Are you pleased with your achievement?

My goal was to raise funds for prosthetics and we have reached £8,000 so far. I will continue to use my abilities to raise funds because there are a lot of soldiers who have sustained serious injuries. Prostheses, particularly for upper limbs, are extremely expensive, are very difficult to make



and require a great number of specialists. On a personal note, I wanted to run the distance within seven hours, so I achieved my goal but I know I can improve and be faster.

What was the hardest part of the marathon?

I hit the wall after the 37th kilometre – strength abandons you and all the energy goes from your body. I began to feel drowsy because my body had exhausted



“We are looking forward to collaborating with experienced organisations like Blesma,” says Roman

all its resources, and I had to start walking in order not to lose consciousness or fall. It took me two kilometres to fully recover.

How were you injured?

A war was going on before the invasion, with Russians bombing and attacking our territory regularly. I was on a combat mission in the Donetsk region when I was injured. There were lots of mines and it was very dangerous. I stepped on one of them and heard the loud bang. I didn't lose consciousness and knew immediately that I would need an amputation because I had seen the same thing with lots of comrades. I just tried to stay alive until they got me to the hospital for the operation. Losing a leg is obviously not good, but it is part of what we have to do to defend our country.

“IT WAS THE DAY I GOT CONVINCED THAT AMPUTATION IS NOT THE END OF LIFE, IT IS ONLY A NEW CHALLENGE”

How did you recover?

I had my right leg amputated at shin level but needed to have another operation at a different hospital which removed more of my leg because of shrapnel damage. The first few days after the injury were really hard, but on the fourth day a volunteer called Yulia came to visit and we became friends and are now married and have two sons. I was incredibly lucky.

How did you get involved in sporting challenges?

When I got injured I told myself one thing: ‘I will lead an even more active life than before the injury.’ Nine months after my injury, I ran my first 50 metres. I will always remember that run as it was the day when I got convinced that amputation is not the end of life, it is only a new challenge.

What have you been doing since?

I have done a number of sporting challenges to keep me motivated and to help inspire people to recover after injury. I work with the Citizen Foundation to raise awareness and funds, and I am now training, volunteering and instructing people with the 92nd Separate Mechanised Brigade. The UK has been a great supporter of Ukraine, and we are looking forward to collaborating with experienced organisations like Blesma as their advice will help us rebuild our country and our people after the war.

Visit <https://2023tcslondonmarathon.enthuse.com/pf/roman-kashpur-2023> to support Roman

Bulletin

Seniors Week full of fun and laughter

Seniors Week proved to be a big success once again. If you haven't tried it yet, why not put your name down for next time?

From lawn bowling to archery, and from spa treatments to historic dockyards, the Blesma Seniors Week had it all. An eight-strong group led by Support Officer South West Sarah Payne and Outreach Officer Scotland Emma Gration enjoyed the spring event that was based at the Sinah Warren Hotel, Hayling Island, Hampshire.

The group visited the historic dockyard in Portsmouth as well as Stansted House; an Edwardian stately home set in 1,800 acres of stunning grounds in the village of Rowlands Castle.

"It was a really fantastic week and we all thoroughly enjoyed ourselves," said Michael Screech, 76, a former Royal Navy Chief Petty Officer who attended with his wife Edwina, 74. "Emma and Sarah did a great job organising everything and we all got on brilliantly together."

"The week was good fun and we've all become friends. Being from a Forces background, I really enjoy company and it was great being with the team for a week."

Michael, who is from Taunton and joined Blesma four years ago, served on frigates and aircraft carriers during his 23-year



Words: Danny Buckland

naval career. After service, he became an operations manager working for a catering company supplying the Armed Forces.

"We got through a lot in the week with shooting, archery and lawn bowls as well as visits to Portsmouth's historic dockyard, where we saw the incredible Mary Rose exhibition," said Emma Gration, Outreach Officer Scotland. "But we also had a day

for relaxation during which Members had the chance to enjoy spa treatments. We had entertainment in the evenings, and we literally ate, chatted and laughed the whole week!

"I would encourage anyone to give Seniors Week a go because it is lots of fun, and you get so much more from it than you might think."

"I would encourage anyone to give Seniors Week a go because it is lots of fun, and you get so much more from it than you might think"

North East: Outreach success over the last five years

As an Outreach Officer of five years with this wonderful charity, I have had the pleasure of seeing joy on many of our Members' faces. We started with a blank canvas way back in 2018, when I sent out an introduction letter with a questionnaire asking what kind of events Members might like to take part in or be keen to attend.

Very quickly, I started to get a sense of a theme to work towards. Members' responses mentioned how fabulous the national activity programme was but that they would also like to be able to attend events with their families. Our working Members in particular wanted more family time during their weekends and leave periods.

So the North East Outreach Programme was born. Over the last five years, we have enjoyed local lunches for our less mobile Members, we have put on family events and activities, explored wonderful places, learned new skills, been on canal boats, tried adapted skiing and horse riding – the list is endless! During Covid, we changed how we put on activities and organised online quizzes, shared audio books and, in collaboration with other companies, we heard the stories of ex-Service personnel and launched a buddy system over Zoom with the Chelsea Pensioners.

We have organised three overnight events, one Christmas Dinner, and an activities weekend working in collaboration with the National Activities Team. The Ladies With Limb Loss seminar that we hosted with the North West area is one of my proudest moments so far. The outcome of this event could not have been planned; the ladies were given the opportunity to talk in safe surroundings and instantly bonded. The support they gave each other was heart-warming, and they still support each other with Zoom meetings and via WhatsApp. Blesma has also received a funding grant to allow this project to be supported further, and we have more exciting events in the pipeline. Anglia Ruskin University will be picking this up and has started with a focus group meeting.



Ken and Vera Foster's 75th wedding anniversary. Sadly, both have since passed away



Steve Watson and Russell Black's donation

Of course, these events and activities are only a selection of the wonderful things we have been involved in over the last five years. Members have now built up a number of friendship groups and meet each other for regular catch-ups. The area prides itself that Members support other Members – giving each other lifts to events and lunches, for example. Widow Members hold befriending calls to other isolated Widows on a regular basis and Members' children are now supporting each other and creating WhatsApp friendship groups.

Last year, we received a Community Lottery Funded Grant to be used for



Attending a local Remembrance parade

specific events over a 12-month period. The Members have greatly benefitted from these events, time after time. We would like to thank the Lottery for its generous donation, and we would also like to thank all the Members and their families who have attended the events – we hope to share many more with you and welcome new Members to the Outreach Programme over the coming months.

I can't forget our wonderful volunteers who help with events on a regular basis or transport Members to activities who may otherwise be isolated.

Adele Miller, Outreach Officer



Above: At Flamingo Land Malton with more than 50 participants; Building on the Blesma/Chelsea Pensioners buddy system (below right)



Sam Fitzgerald and Simon Bowes-Daniels with their families



Wet Wheels Yorkshire Amble family day trip



Scotland: Curling, Carnoustie and cracking cake competitions

BLESMA LUNCHES

Not many of us feel like getting out and about in Scotland over the winter months, so we arranged a few lunches for Members to enjoy each other's company. It was lovely to see some new faces come along.

CURLING IN HAMILTON

Scottish Curling approached Blesma and a day's taster session was arranged at Hamilton Ice Rink, home of Lanarkshire Wheelchair Curlers. Member David Bain curls for the club and arranged for some of his team-mates to coach Members. Scottish Curling provided more coaches, and the day was very enjoyable.

GOLF AT CARNOUSTIE

Carnoustie Links Golf Club hosted Members for a day that consisted of a skills test in the simulator and time on the (very windy!) 'Nestie' course before a competition in the simulator. Complete novices as well as seasoned golfers attended, and there were prizes for all three activities. Well done to James Smith for winning the skills test and the afternoon competition, and Alan Izzard for winning the Nestie course competition. Finally, congratulations to Iain Wallace for winning the wooden spoon (beautifully engraved by Member Andy McQueen).

BO'NESS & KINNEIL STEAM TRAIN

Another suggestion for an activity, this time from Andy McQueen, has proved to be the most popular activity in Scotland to date. It was supported with transport as always by Fares4Free for those Members who are unable to make their way to activities, we had lovely weather and enjoyed a trip on the steam train with time to chat to the station staff, conductors and the driver. We were lucky to also be joined on the train by Scottish comedian and TV presenter Susan Calman, who was filming something for television. Susan was very kind and had her photo taken with Member Alan Izzard and his wife Julie, as it was Julie's birthday.



Brushing up on their skills: Members enjoy a curling taster session at Hamilton Ice Rink



Meeting other Members at a Blesma lunch



Baking winner Mick Currie and Jessica



Putting on a show at Carnoustie Golf Club



A day on the Bo'ness & Kinneil steam train



Time to take in the tartan exhibition at the V&A Museum in Dundee



Third place in the bake off for Rose Tippen

V&A MUSEUM VISIT

The V&A Museum in Dundee put on an exhibition about tartan which made for a great day out. A guided tour was followed by a nice lunch, which allowed Members to get to know each other.

EASTER BAKING COMPETITION

Kits for Hot Cross Bunnies or Raspberry Swirl biscuits were sent out and the winners of the last competition, Steve Becala and

his family, judged the impressive entries. The winner was Mick Currie and his granddaughter Jessica, second place was Mike Mellon's daughter Eve and third place was Rose Tippen, the wife of a Member. The next competition will be during the school summer holidays in July.

FRIDAY ONLINE DROP-IN

Our regular online drop-in sessions continue, and Ben Saunders from Wessex Archaeology come along to one session to talk about recent and future projects. This appealed to Member Ken De Soyza who joined the team for a geophysics survey in Burntisland, Fife and he later took some drone footage of one of the sites.

PROSTHETIC AND PAIN MANAGEMENT FORUM

A popular forum held every six-to-eight weeks that attracts a mix of Members. It is a great opportunity for the BSO to give an overview of the current situation in the five Limb Centres, which is then followed by an open forum for Members to provide

updates, and discuss and share various tips and stories. Recent sessions have helped Members to work more closely with their prosthetists to manage issues.

BOOK GROUP

A popular at-home activity. Members enjoy reading books that they might not otherwise choose, then discuss them on a Zoom call. These events generate a closer bond between Members.

WIDOWS, SPOUSES AND PARTNERS ONLINE DROP-IN

This group meets on a monthly basis in the evenings and offers the chance to catch up with each other, share experiences and generally have a laugh.

MEMBER-LED ACTIVITIES GOOD CRAIC QUIZ

Member Lorraine Anderson was back throughout the period with entertaining and fun quizzes. The final one before the summer break was well attended and full of laughs and banter.

ONLINE FLIGHT SIMULATION

Member John Bacon is currently flying around the world using his flight simulator and welcomed Blesma Members to join him on a Wednesday afternoon at 2pm. If there is enough interest, John has proposed that he will take his equipment to a local venue and allow Members to have a go at flying. Get in touch with Outreach Officer Emma Gration if you are interested. You can find her contact details on p68.

WHAT'S NEXT

Canal Boat Trip – Inverness (15 June), Summer Baking Competition (June/July), Sailing – Fife (04 July), Blair Dummond Safari Park – Stirling (11 July), Shooting Taster – Kincardine (19 July), Scottish Fire Service Tour of Training Facility (01 August), Gliding – Portmaack (25 August and 09 September).

Emma Gration, Outreach Officer

Wales and West: Welfare visits and wellbeing weeks

From February to early May Tom Hall, BSO Wales and West (with the help of his Welfare Volunteers and Outreach Officer), carried out more than 33 home visits, seven visits to support Members at Limb Centres and 23 visits to Members at other venues, which included attendance at debt management meetings, MoD housing adaptations, NHS and DWP appointments. Outreach events are becoming more popular, with at least 10 activities and social lunches organised for 55 different Members during that same period. Family members were also able to join us for trips to the zoo in Chester and Manor Park Animal Farm in West Wales. It's always rewarding to see children having fun, with their family members looking on and enjoying some good early spring weather. Online cheese making continues and the archery tuition and workshop gave Blesma Members a chance to stalk through the woods to test their aiming skills!

The Member area social groups continue to be popular, and both the BSO and Outreach Officer would like to encourage all those who haven't yet taken part in a Member lunch to come along and connect with others. These lunches bring together people of all abilities and disabilities, with great advice on how to care for your residual limb, how to use a wheelchair or how to cope when you're feeling down as a carer of someone living with limb loss or loss of use of their limbs. These events are crucial in offering positive support to one another, and they should be taken advantage of whenever possible.

We are now heading into the late spring and summer period so events and activities will be hotting up and Tom will be out visiting and supporting Members.

WALES AND WEST WELLBEING AND SUPPORT WORK

Members having to wait long periods for NHS appointments, benefits claims and war pension applications continues. This means an increase in advocacy for BSO Wales and West, utilising links and



Chris Smart stalking in the woods and enjoying the outdoors with Outreach



David Sandles in the woods with his dog. Loss of use of limb is not holding him back

partnerships across his area to solve or improve the mounting issues. The cost of living continues to cause anxiety across large swathes of the membership, and this means an increase in requests for help with home adaptations and access to gardens, and help with mobility and disability aids.

Tom continues to travel right across Wales and West, including visits as far north as Conwy in North Wales and the Wirral in the far east of his area. This means regularly spending nights away from home to support Members and Widows.

“The job is busy and our Members are so spread out, but I operate on who needs me the most and this includes visiting our new Members at home for the first time,” says Tom. “This sometimes means spending time away from home, but I find the role extremely rewarding. To be able to set your own diary and help others each and every day is a positive experience.

“The old job of welfare support is increasingly turning into supporting to improve wellbeing and independence. Helping to provide a catalyst for positive change to Members’ health and lifestyle is a challenge, and increasing awareness around mobility and independence is crucial to this.”

To arrange a visit or for advice, information or support, contact Tom on 07780 165085 or by email at bsowest@blesma.org

LLANDUDNO MULTI-ACTIVITY AND WELLBEING COURSE

Tom and Jason organised a Wellbeing Week in partnership with Blind Veterans UK, with five Members from across the



Gam Gurung winning archery best shot at the BVUK Centre, Llandudno, North Wales



Don't look down: Steve Thomas gets to the top of the climbing wall

These are just a few of the activities enjoyed:

- St David's Day dinner
- Colwyn Bay social lunch
- Hereford area social lunch
- Manor Farm family day
- Chester Zoo family day
- Online cheese tasting workshop
- Newport area social lunch
- Shrewsbury area social lunch
- Archery tuition and workshop

These types of activities continue to be popular, but Jason is always looking for ideas for different activities so would like to invite Members to get in touch with their own ideas for future events.

FUTURE OUTREACH EVENTS FOR OUR MEMBERS AND FAMILIES TO ENJOY:

Wrexham area social lunch

14 June 12:30-3pm

Zip World North Wales

15 June 12:00-4pm. Come and learn to fly!

Cardiff area social lunch

29 June 12:30-3pm

These are just some of the cracking events being organised by Outreach Officer Jason. If you would like to come along to any, or would like to find out more about the activities programme, contact Jason on 07741 744141 or email him at outreachwest@blesma.org

SUMMARY

It's been another hectic but positive few months for Wales and West. Although life can be very difficult and at times traumatic for Members and their families and carers, the support offered by the Blesma family is always greatly appreciated and the connections formed can last a lifetime. Please get involved, keep in touch with your Blesma team and feel free to contact us if you need to.

Tom Hall and Jason Suller



Roy Townsend and his wife Diane enjoying lunch with the Cardiff Social Group organised through the Wales and West Outreach Programme

UK enjoying an action-packed week at the Blind Veterans UK Centre in Llandudno, North Wales. "The week went well and was enjoyable for everyone," said Steve Thomas from Newport. "We all have different conditions that we have to overcome, and I met new people, which was great for me!"

The week was based on the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' and certainly helped those who attended. The week consisted of

paddleboarding, fireside chats about health and nutrition, indoor target rifle shooting, chess, evening entertainment, archery, crafts and much more. A great week!

MEMBER ACTIVITIES AND SOCIAL LUNCHES

Outreach Officer Jason Suller has been busy organising activities and social lunches for Members and their families.

Northern Ireland: pottery, pooches and the planets

Whether you are 81 years young or six years old, our day at Mud Ireland proved you are never too old to get your hands dirty. Under the tuition of master potter Josh, everyone had the opportunity to show off their flair and imagination on the potter's wheel. We returned two weeks later for a 'paint and glaze' session. Thank you to the National Lottery Community Fund NI.

ARMAGH OBSERVATORY AND PLANETARIUM

Members were able to sit back, relax, and experience the wonders of our universe in the digital full-dome theatre at the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium before they were given a guided tour by staff.

Meanwhile, getting up close with the giants of steam at Whitehead Railway Museum was a revelation. Volunteers from the Preservation Society of Ireland shared their knowledge of all things locomotive. Thanks to Outreach Volunteer Paul Crilly for all his work in coordinating this visit.

WORKING TOGETHER

Hounds for Heroes travelled to Northern Ireland for a flying visit, and it was great to reunite with Allen Parton who is a Blesma Member and the charity's founder. Allen, a Royal Navy veteran who was seriously injured in the aftermath of the Gulf War, shared his story of how a dog called Endal gave him his life back. Pupils from Banbridge High School, who passionately support and work with Hounds for Heroes, came along to meet with Blesma Members as well as Blind Veterans and Help for Heroes beneficiaries.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AWARENESS RAISING AND FUNDRAISING

Community engagement, awareness raising and fundraising have been highlights of these past few months. BSO Steve Burton and I attended a Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) event called *A Decade of the Covenant* hosted alongside the Northern



Brian Lawrence tries out the potter's wheel (left) and the Whitehead Railway Museum



Wayne McMullan at the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium (left) and Hounds for Heroes

Ireland Veteran Support Office (NIVSO) with the focus on reducing disadvantage and strengthening support for the veteran community in Northern Ireland.

BRANTWOOD MILITARY HERITAGE ASSOCIATION

Huge thanks must go to Brantwood Military Heritage Association who organised a 'sold out' Blesma fundraiser evening in April. Outreach Volunteer Drew Thompson, Blesma Member Graham Kelly and his wife Cathy must also be mentioned for the time and effort they put into making this event a resounding success; they raised more than £3,000 for Blesma.

The Band of His Majesty's Royal Marines Scotland invited Blesma to join them in St Anne's Cathedral, where we were treated to a fantastic musical performance and were given the opportunity to introduce Blesma. The RBL NI Motorcycle Branch and the Ulster Branch Irish Guards Association also donated funds to Blesma – thank you to them!

Alongside the numerous face-to-face events and activities, Members have also had the opportunity to enjoy some at-home projects, online workshops and catch-ups. The focus also remains on outreach home/residential visits.

Fiona Morrison, Outreach Officer

News from around the Blesma Branch network

BOURNEMOUTH BRANCH

Most people of my generation often ask the question: "Where were you when England won the World Cup?" I was Quartermaster on the gangway of HMS Naid alongside in Liverpool. We had a little radio and were listening to the game. Why is this relevant? Well, I rang our new Outreach Officer Gordon Clark to make my number, and it turns out that he too served on HMS Naid (Leander Class Frigate). This was many years later, of course, and although the ship had been much altered it basically remained the same.

Gordon joined us at the end of February and has already made an impact. The Branch has been invited to lunch at the Lobster Pot Café, which is next to the Lighthouse and well known to Portland Squadron veterans as it is right out on the end of Portland Bill.

The Branch held a meeting in Dorchester last June which was followed by lunch at the Duchess of Cornwall. Hazel, our treasurer, was in charge. Our last meeting included the Branch AGM, where all the usual suspects were re-elected, and I am very grateful for their support. A new post, that of Social Secretary, was created and I am happy to announce that Brendan and Ann will continue to organise Branch lunches.

We hold our meetings at The Bournemouth War Memorial Homes (BWMH) and this is their 75th year. We had many Members resident there over the years, and I am glad to say that is still the case.

We will have our stand in Weymouth for this year's Armed Forces Weekend celebration. This will be on the Sunday so as to enjoy the 'Parade of Standards' and the WWII vehicle drive-past, which is quite a spectacle. We will be on the front, usually opposite the back door of M&S. If you are down that way we would be pleased to see you.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- 18 June Weymouth Armed Forces Day
- 04 Sept Branch Meeting (10.30) at The Bournemouth War Memorial Homes

CONTACTS

Peter Sherston-Baker 01202 523020

Brendan Snoddy 01305 820035

Maryjane Sweetzer 075 998 40893

Gordon Clark (Outreach Officer)

07788 312747

Yours Aye

Peter Sherston-Baker

SOUTHAMPTON AND DISTRICT BRANCH

As a Branch, we are keeping in touch with our members with emails and phone calls to see if everyone is ok and to check if anyone needs any assistance. We would like to welcome members who have joined us from the Portsmouth Branch. The Branch had a spring lunch on 29 March at the White Swan in Mansbridge which was enjoyed by the 24 members who attended.

Two boat trips have been arranged on The Alison Macgregor on 26 July and 06 September.

Best wishes to all Blesma Members.

Dave Rowe
Chairman



NOTTINGHAM BRANCH

The Branch members were delighted to attend the first Branch Christmas Lunch in three years on 13 December. We decided to try a new venue – The DoubleTree by Hilton Nottingham Gateway – which was a huge success and therefore we plan to return this December.

We held our Branch AGM on Monday 20 March where we welcomed some new members and reinstated our Branch Officers, who are doing a marvellous job. Our Branch Welfare Officer Jayne Waring remains busy, keeping regular contact with our members and also assisting the BSO.

We will be holding our remaining 2023 meetings/lunches on 11 July (11.30), 12 September (12.30) and 14 November (11.30) 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.

On Sunday 23 July we are planning to be at Thoresby Park to raise awareness of Blesma and the Nottingham Branch. It is a beautiful venue which has a military museum. One of our members works there and we hope to enjoy some refreshments together as a Branch. A dog show is also being held there that day, so it should be a fun day if you would like to come along.

During August, we will be having a summer evening meal – the venue and date are to be confirmed. If you are interested in joining the Branch, or would like to know more about our activities, please contact me, the Branch Honorary Secretary, on 07794 309927 or by sending an email to secretary.nottingham@blesma.org

David Ledger

Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care

Welcome to the Bulletin's regular section on the benefits system. As well as highlighting some useful information regarding the benefits system, on occasions we will be raising awareness of some health and social care matters or other available support. Blesma Members can either contact their Support Officer for further information about their benefit entitlement or contact Blesma's Benefits and Social Care Adviser Liz Watling on **020 8548 7080** or email **iwabenefits@blesma.org** Please note these contact details are for Blesma Members only.

COST OF LIVING PAYMENTS

In our last Bulletin we updated Members that some of the previous year's Cost of Living Payments were going to continue for another year. However, we did not have the finer details at the time. Whilst we do not have all the payment dates, we do have further information on the qualifying criteria. You will not need to apply. If you are eligible you will be paid automatically in the same way you usually get your benefit or tax credits. This is also true if you are found to be eligible at a later date and your benefit is backdated to cover a cost of living payment date.

Important: If you receive a message asking you to either apply or contact someone about the payment, this may be a scam. If you are concerned, please speak to your Support Officer.

There are five payments, three for the cost of living, one for pensioners and one for disability. You will receive a payment for each one you meet the criteria for. None of the payments are taxable and they will not affect the benefits or tax credits you receive.

LOW INCOME BENEFITS AND TAX CREDITS COST OF LIVING PAYMENT

You may be entitled to up to three Cost of Living Payments of £301, £300 and £299 if you get any of the following benefits or tax credits on certain dates:

INCOME-BASED JOBSEEKER'S ALLOWANCE, INCOME-RELATED EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE, INCOME SUPPORT OR PENSION CREDIT

You are eligible for the first Cost of Living Payment of £301 if you were entitled to a payment for any day during the period 26 January 2023 to 25 February 2023.

UNIVERSAL CREDIT

You are eligible for the first Cost of Living Payment of £301 if you were entitled to a payment of Universal Credit for an assessment period that ended in the period 26 January 2023 to 25 February 2023.

TAX CREDITS

You are eligible for the first Cost of Living Payment of £301 if you received a payment of tax credits for any day in the period 26 January 2023 to 25 February 2023.

The payment will be made separately from your benefit payments. If you receive tax credits and one of the other low income benefits, you will only receive one Cost of Living Payment. If you are receiving tax credits or low income benefit as a couple, you will only receive one Cost of Living Payment.

When will you be paid?

If you are entitled you will get, or will have already received:

- £301 between 25 April 2023 and 17 May 2023 for most people on DWP benefits
- £301 paid between 02 and 09 May 2023 for most people on tax credits and no other low income benefits
- The further two Cost of Living Payments will be made at a later date. The Government is yet to announce the benefit entitlement dates for these payments. However, they have given a payment window for the payment:
 - £300 paid during autumn 2023 for most people
 - £299 paid during spring 2024 for most people

DISABILITY COST OF LIVING PAYMENT

You may be entitled to a Disability Cost of Living Payment of £150 if you get any of the following benefits on a certain date:

- Attendance Allowance
- Constant Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance
- Personal Independence Payment
- Adult Disability Payment
- Child Disability Payment
- Armed Forces Independence Payment
- War Pension Mobility Supplement

If you are receiving a qualifying payment through War Pension or Armed Forces Independence Payment and you also receive a qualifying benefit from the Department for Work and Pensions, you will receive one Disability Cost of Living Payment only. This will be paid via the Department for Work and Pensions.

When will you be paid?

Most people will be paid the £150 Disability Cost of Living Payment in summer 2023.

PENSIONER COST OF LIVING PAYMENT

If you are entitled to a Winter Fuel Payment for Winter 2023/24, you will get an extra £150 or £300 paid with your normal payment for the coming winter.

The full amount of Winter Fuel Payment (including the Pensioner Cost of Living Payment) you will get for this winter depends on when you were born and your circumstances during the qualifying dates.

If you are eligible, you will be sent a letter in October or November advising how much you will receive and when your payment will be made. We will also update Members in following Bulletins.

UNIVERSAL CREDIT MIGRATION

Universal Credit is a benefit to support you if you are on a low income, whether in or out of work. It includes support for the cost of housing, children and childcare, and financial support for people with disabilities, carers, and people who are



too ill or disabled to work. It is a means-tested benefit so your income and savings will affect your entitlement, although some of your income and capital may be ignored.

Universal Credit replaces the following (known as legacy benefits):

- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Housing Benefit

If you receive any of these benefits or tax credits and your circumstances change, you may need to claim Universal Credit. If you are already claiming any of these benefits or tax credits, you will be expected to change

to Universal Credit at some stage, whether or not your circumstances have changed. The Department for Work and Pensions will get in touch with you at this point.

There are three main ways you may need to make a claim for Universal Credit. Due to the complexities of the system, we would recommend speaking to your Blesma Support Officer before making a claim. If you are already receiving one or more of the benefits above, a claim for Universal Credit will result in these benefits stopping and you may find yourself financially worse off.

If you are not on a legacy benefit, then you should consider a claim for Universal Credit if you are on a low income. You can find more details on Universal Credit and also input your details into an online checker on the government website to calculate your possible entitlement

(www.gov.uk/universal-credit).

If you are on a legacy benefit and have a change of circumstances, you may be told to claim Universal Credit and all your legacy benefits will stop. This is known as 'natural migration'. You may be financially worse off. In some cases you may receive more money. If you are advised to claim Universal Credit, please speak to your Blesma Support Officer before you make the Universal Credit claim. In some instances, it may be possible to remain on your legacy benefits.

In the next few years, the Government will write to those still on legacy benefits informing them that they will have to claim Universal Credit regardless of whether there is a change of circumstances or not. This is known as 'managed migration'. If you claim Universal Credit under this route

Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care

and would be worse off, you will receive an extra payment known as transitional payment. Currently, the managed migration only affects those who are on tax credits. At some point next year, those who receive either Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or Housing Benefit will be contacted to claim Universal Credit. The remaining Income-related Employment and Support Allowance cases are not expected to be migrated until 2028 (unless you have a change of circumstances).

ADVICE ON SCAMS

Scams can come in many guises, meaning it can be all too easy to fall victim to them. New and different scams are cropping up all the time. There are many ways people can be targeted, including through fake websites, emails, telephone calls, door knocking, texts and WhatsApp messages.

What can you do to avoid falling victim?

Here are some of the scams and possible ways to avoid becoming a victim...

FAKE WEBSITES

Check you are logging into the official website you are searching for. This may not be the website at the top of the list your search has identified. Warning signs that the site may be fake include bad grammar or spelling.

DOORSTEP SCAMS

If you receive an unsolicited knock on the door from someone claiming to be from an organisation, even with an identification badge, be wary. Do not give personal details or money. Do not sign up to anything if you don't know what you are entering into or who you are dealing with. And do not let door-to-door salesmen into your house. If you feel uncomfortable, close the door.

COLD CALLING

Cold calling is a tried-and-tested way to try and con people out of their personal and financial details. Be wary of calls out of the blue. Banks and other reputable



organisations will never ask for information such as your PIN, password or bank details over the phone. If you are concerned, you can put the phone down and contact the organisation directly to check if they have contacted you. Do not redial the number that has just called you.

MALWARE

Malware is malicious software installed into your computer without your knowledge. This enables fraudsters to steal personal information or perform actions through your device. It is important to ensure your security software is up to date to avoid this.

Fraudsters can send emails known as 'phishing' which purport to be from your bank or other organisation. These emails will try to trick you to click on fake links which risk your device being infected with malware, or make you hand over sensitive personal or financial information. Things to look out for include spelling or grammatical mistakes, the sender using generic terms such as 'Sir' or 'Madam' rather than addressing you personally, a sense of urgency or a request for personal information. Similar scams use contact by text rather than email.

What can you do to protect yourself?

Never give debit or credit card numbers, PINs, or other personal information in

response to a cold caller, unsolicited email, text or online request. A genuine bank or organisation will never contact you unsolicited and ask for your details.

- If you are asked to move your money into another account always contact your bank directly beforehand
- Never reply to an email, click on links, open attachments or ring a number within the message if you don't know exactly where it came from
- Keep on top of security updates on your mobile device, laptop or PC
- Be wary of using public wifi, as you risk exposing your personal information
- When shopping online, always look for 'secure transaction' symbols. The web address should start 'https' and there should be a padlock in the browser window.

Remember that a contact from a genuine source would not try to put you under pressure and be fully understanding if you wanted to make your own enquiries before you take anything further.

For more information visit <https://www.takefive-stopfraud.org.uk> or <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/our-work/our-campaigns> or call Citizens Advice customer service on 0808 223 1133

Ray Hazan

08 February 1945 - 02 April 2023

On 03 October 1973, Captain Raymond Hazan was a company second-in-command with 2nd Battalion the Royal Anglian Regiment in Londonderry when a parcel was taken to his military unit. "It went off and everything suddenly went black," recalled Ray, who lost his right hand and sight in the blast, in a BBC interview the following year. "I was 28, had been married three years and was about to be a father."

Raymond (Ray) Lazare Hazan was born in 1945 in Cheshire. He went to Sandhurst at the age of 18, and was commissioned in 1965. Two years later, when his battalion was serving on a UN tour of duty in Cyprus, he met Jennifer Marriner. They married in 1970 and had two sons. The marriage was dissolved and, in 1988, Ray married Margaret Johnson, whom he met while working for St Dunstan's (now Blind Veterans UK), where she was the archivist.

Ray was discharged from the Army in 1974, and in 1976 he joined the Nato school of interpreting. He left the following year to become assistant public relations officer at St Dunstan's. In 2004, he became president of St Dunstan's, and later of the International Congress of War Blinded Associations. He commissioned research to better understand what type of support was most beneficial in helping veterans recover their independent life.

"After the blast, my world came to a grinding halt: the sense of loss was like a bereavement. The thought that I would never read, kick a football or see my children was an extreme blow, and I felt almost paralysed with shock," Ray said in 2009. He remembered his first day at St Dunstan's, some six weeks after the blast: "I heard the chatter and laughter of other St Dunstaners and thought: 'Perhaps blindness isn't that bad.' The positive attitude of those I met was catching . . . My son was born a few months later and I had no opportunity to get down. I had to be a father to my son and this was another challenge to keep me going. The thought of getting back to work was hugely motivating for me. I wanted to be able to provide for my family."

Ray was appointed OBE in 2012, and finally stood down as the charity's president in 2017. His successor said of him that he "had the unique ability to both command respect and to inspire people at the same time. A fantastic orator, he was an intelligent, articulate, thoughtful and charismatic man."

Captain Ray Hazan OBE, president of St Dunstan's (Blind Veterans UK), was born on 08 February 1945. He died on 02 April 2023 of ischaemia and atherosclerosis complicated by dementia. He was 78 years old.



Credit: The Times

Those who have passed away

May they rest in peace

ALLSOPP M	Royal Artillery	07/02/2023
ASHMORE J	Widow	10/02/2023
BARNETT G	Widow	22/03/2023
BETHELL B	Royal Army Medical Corps	03/03/2023
BLYTH P	Widow	07/02/2023
BUTLAND M	Parachute Regiment	21/04/2023
CAWDRON M	Widow	07/02/2023
CLINTON R	Royal Horse Artillery	05/05/2023
COST-CHRETIEN F	Royal Navy	06/04/2023
CROASDALE J	Widow	07/02/2023
DRYDEN A	Royal Navy	18/04/2023
EATON W	York and Lancaster	07/02/2023
EDMONDS C	Widow	07/02/2023
FITZPATRICK J	Royal Scots	24/03/2023
FLETCHER D	Army Catering Corps	07/02/2023
FORD E	REME	20/04/2023
FREEL J	Royal Horse Artillery	07/02/2023
GREENE K	Royal Scots	03/03/2023
HARRIS J	Widow	03/03/2023
HOOSON L	Grenadier Guards	07/02/2023
HUDSON S	Royal Air Force	07/02/2023
JEWKES P	Widow	07/02/2023
KAVANAGH J	Royal Irish Fusiliers	28/04/2023
KITCHEN E	Widow	07/02/2023
LAW I	Widow	07/02/2023
LINN M	Civilian Casualty	03/03/2023
LISTER I	Widow	28/03/2023
MIDDLEDITCH C	Widow	07/02/2023
MILLER I	Scots Guards	07/02/2023
MORGAN C	Gordon Highlanders	03/03/2023
PAYNE B	Royal Artillery	05/04/2023
PIENAROSA P	Royal Army Service Corps	03/03/2023
POOLMAN M	Royal Military Police	24/03/2023
POSTIN E	Royal Marines	10/03/2023
RIMMER S	Widow	20/04/2023
SHARP T	Royal Air Force	12/05/2023
SIMMONS R	Royal Navy	06/03/2023
SIMMS K	Royal Navy	03/03/2023
SMALE M	Royal Navy	07/02/2023
THOMS J	Royal Air Force	27/03/2023
TURRELL P	Widow	03/05/2023
VERTH N	Royal Air Force	10/03/2023
WARDLE D	Princess of Wales Royal Regt	03/05/2023
WELLBELOVE S	Royal Army Service Corps	17/04/2023
WHALEY R	Royal Air Force	04/04/2023
WHITEMAN P	Royal Engineers	17/04/2023
WILLIAMS T	Royal Marines	27/04/2023

Useful contact numbers across the Association

TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
BLESMA SUPPORT OFFICERS			
BSO (Prosthetics)	Brian Chenier	M 07796 715908	bsoprosthetics@blesma.org
BSO Eastern	Kevin Long	T 020 3954 3020 M 07825 536364	bsoeastern@blesma.org
BSO London & South East	Steven Burrell	T 020 7501 3030 M 07469 242277	bsolve@blesma.org
BSO Midlands	Vanessa Lucas	T 020 8548 7095 M 07825 536363	bsomid@blesma.org
BSO North East	Christine Landess	T 020 3954 3027 M 07917 972825	bsone@blesma.org
BSO North West	Amanda Brownlie	T 01257 795144 M 07825 536362	bsonw@blesma.org
BSO Scotland & Northern Ireland	Steve Burton	M 07766 258461	bsosniroi@blesma.org
BSO South	Pat Donnachie	T 020 3954 3026 M 07741 846106	bsosouth@blesma.org
BSO South West	Sarah Payne	M 07741 737563	bsosw@blesma.org
BSO Wales and West	Tom Hall	T 020 8548 7098 M 07780 165085	bsowest@blesma.org
Members Living Overseas	Liz Watling	T 020 8548 3516	iwabenefits@blesma.org
BLESMA OUTREACH OFFICERS			
Outreach Officer Eastern	Francesca Anastasio	M 07741 661159	outreacheastern@blesma.org
Outreach Officer London & South East	Jess Linge	M 07741 845793	outreachlse@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Midlands	Sian Richardson	M 07741845429	outreachmid@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Northern Ireland	Fiona Morrison	M 07741 744617	outreachni@blesma.org
Outreach Officer North East	Adele Miller	M 07741 847211	outreachne@blesma.org
Outreach Officer North West	Catherine Green	M 07741 846674	
Outreach Officer Scotland	Emma Gration	M 07884 695703	outreachscotland@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South	Elmo Moses	M 07384 834449	outreachsouth@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South West	Gordon Clark	M 07788 312747	outreachsw@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Wales and West	Jason Suller	M 07741 744141	outreachwest@blesma.org

What do you think of assistive technologies?

Members are being asked for input into a research project on the effectiveness of wheelchairs, scooters and hand cycles in everyday life.

Developed in response to Member feedback, the project aims to understand more about the role assistive technologies (AT) play and the frustrations and challenges they might have.

Veterans can participate by supplying a video diary of their everyday AT use and/or by taking part in an interview with

the Anglia Ruskin University Veterans & Families Institute for Military Social Research.

The research, funded by The Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) Health Innovation Fund, will help Blesma enhance its service delivery and influence support from other charities and health and social care providers.

For more on this study and how to get involved, and to find out about other research projects Blesma is involved in, turn to p20



Have your say on the effectiveness of ATs and help Blesma research

TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
INDEPENDENCE AND WELLBEING			
Head of Welfare Support	Colin Branch	T 020 8548 7090	hws@blesma.org
Benefits and Social Care Advisor	Liz Watling	T 020 8548 7080	iwabenefits@blesma.org
Grants and Outreach Activities Executive	Jackie King	T 020 8548 3516	goaexec@blesma.org
Membership, Branch and Volunteer Network Executive	Debbie Mayne	T 020 8548 7093	mbvexec@blesma.org
Welfare – Direct Line		T 020 8598 9459	
ACTIVITIES			
Activities Manager	Jess March	T 020 8548 3519	activities@blesma.org
Activities and Events Coordinator	Clare Wellings	T 020 3954 3021	ae@blesma.org
Activities and Events Coordinator	Nicole Findlay	T 020 8548 7097	aelocal@blesma.org
FUNDRAISING			
Head of Fundraising	Anna Scalera	T 020 8548 3517	hf@blesma.org
Senior Community and Events Officer	Abbie-Louise Mills	T 020 8548 7089	communityeventsofficersnr@blesma.org
Corporate & Regional Fundraising Mgr	Chris Knight	M 07774 797318	crfm@blesma.org
Senior Corporate Fundraising Officer	Alana Warwick	T 020 8590 1124	scfo@blesma.org
COMMUNICATIONS			
Digital Media Manager	Nick Tuck	T 01299 896282	digitalmedia@blesma.org
Blesma Magazine			editor@blesma.org
DIRECTORS			
Chief Executive	Jon Bryant	T 020 8548 3512	ce@blesma.org
Operations Director	Tony Bloomfield	T 020 8548 3513	od@blesma.org
Interim Director Independence and Wellbeing	Brian Chenier	T 07796 715908	bsoprosthetics@blesma.org
USEFUL CONTACTS			
Main Office		T 020 8590 1124	info@blesma.org

Bakers bring in the dough for Blesma

Blesma bakers have turned up the heat by raising a total of £2,144 for the recent Bake for Blesma Challenge. The Redricks Target Shooting Club in Sawbridgeworth hit the spot by collecting £855, while Blesma Member Andy Derry raised £452 at the Friendly Tuesday Club in Amesbury, Wiltshire. Member Jenna Becala raised £336 with a bake sale at her home and Donna Molloy, wife of Member Conrad, held a Bake for Blesma party that brought in another £111. Corporate partners Surewise also got creative with a bake sale at their offices in Hadleigh.



Bakers helped the public pile on the pounds for Blesma

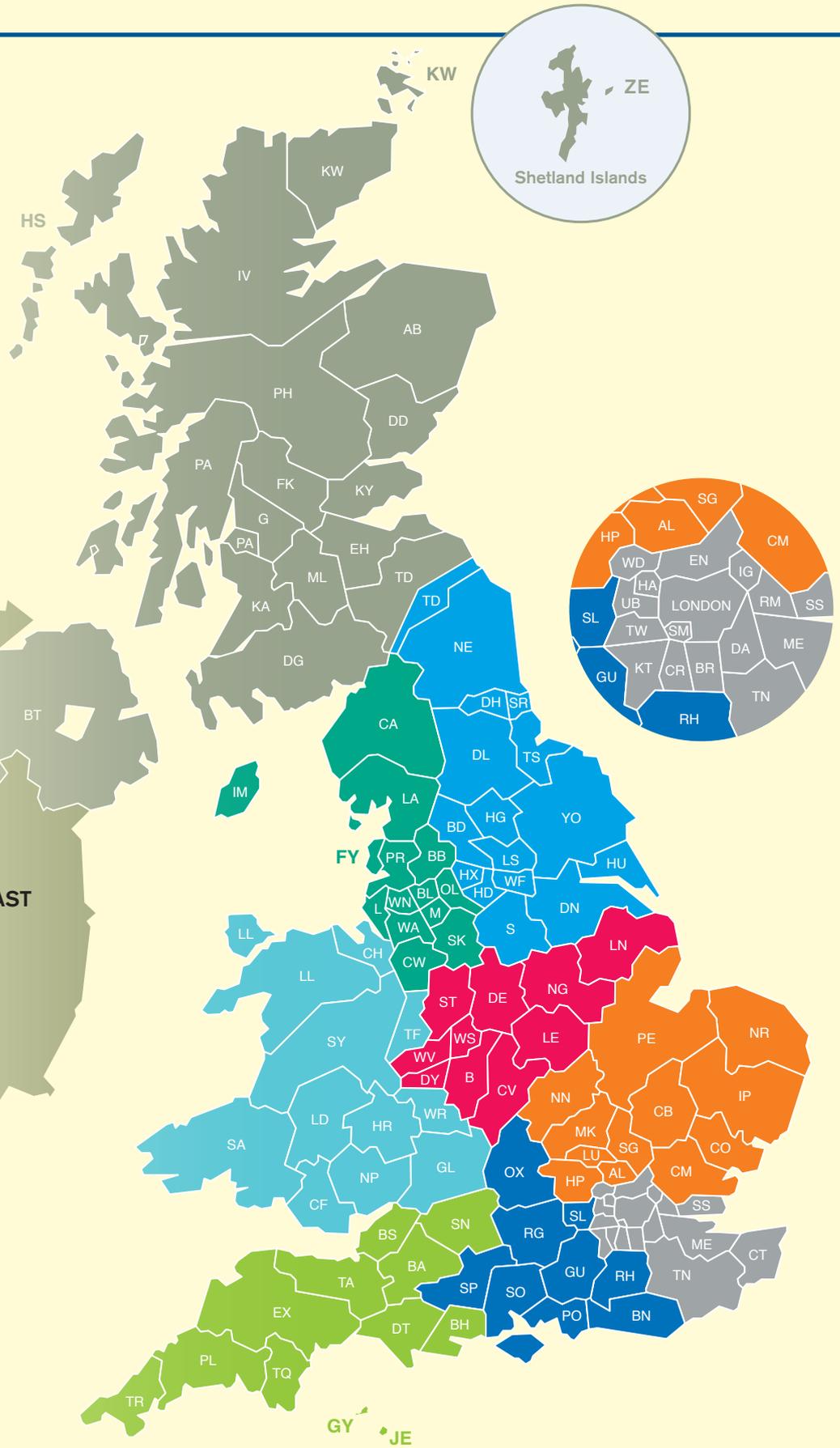
How would you like to receive yours?

If you no longer want to get a printed copy of the magazine and would prefer a digital copy, email us at editor@blesma.org. We are also researching ways to make better use of email to keep in touch with Members and are examining how we can enable more Members to participate in our AGM and vote online. Details will be given in the Autumn issue.

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 p68.

- SCOTLAND & NI
- NORTH WEST
- NORTH EAST
- EASTERN
- MIDLANDS
- WALES AND WEST
- SOUTH
- SOUTH WEST
- LONDON AND SOUTH EAST



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Only
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*“Blesma was there
for me right from
the start.”*

Lionel O'Connor

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£25,000

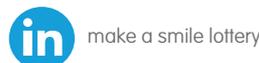
Play
once or
regularly
every
week



SCAN ME



to find out more!



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Free Will writing service

Blesma is partnered with two free Will writing services for anyone wishing to leave a gift in their Will.

The National Free Wills Network will connect you to a local solicitor to guide you through the process of writing or amending your Will.

Guardian Angel's online process is quick and easy. Every Will is fully checked by their team of qualified solicitors.

A gift in your Will helps us be there for limbless and injured veterans. Always.



1 in 5 Blesma Members is helped through gifts in Wills

Guardian Angel online process takes just 30 minutes

National Free Wills Network sends a Will writing pack by post or email

No obligation to leave a gift

Learn more

Contact
legacies@blesma.org
020 8548 7085

Visit
blesma.org/legacy