

# Blesma

The magazine for limbless and injured veterans | Spring 2025

**PLUS:**

MEET BLESMA'S  
FIRST WIDOWS' REP  
TREKKING IN BHUTAN  
SCULPTURE AND  
STORYTELLING  
BENEFITS UPDATE

**BULLETIN INSIDE**

## NO SUCH THING AS RUSH HOUR

HOW THE VETERANS'  
MOBILITY FUND HELPS  
JONATHAN BELL WITH  
HIS WORK/LIFE BALANCE



THE ACTIVITIES  
CALENDAR 2025 IS  
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**PLUS:** ALL THE NEWS AND VIEWS FROM ACROSS THE ASSOCIATION



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DISCOVER HOW  
THE ALL-NEW  
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STORYTELLING  
COURSE COULD  
BENEFIT YOU





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THE LIMBLESS VETERANS



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**EDITORIAL** If you have a story you'd like to put in the next issue, or if you'd like to get in touch to let us know what you think of this issue, drop us a line at [editor@blesma.org](mailto:editor@blesma.org)



Please send any written correspondence to the Blesma office at:  
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Words: Danny Buckland

## Craig hopes to sail into record books on epic Pacific challenge

FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER HE LOST THREE LIMBS IN A BOMB BLAST IN AFGHANISTAN, CRAIG WOOD IS ABOUT TO SET OFF ON A PERILOUS SOLO WORLD-RECORD SAILING EXPEDITION

**T**riple amputee Craig Wood is embarking on what may be his greatest challenge yet – a solo and unsupported 6,000-mile voyage across the Pacific Ocean. The experienced sailor will tackle unpredictable seas – anything from huge waves and hurricanes to days of zero wind – on his 70-day challenge from La Paz in Mexico to Yokohama in Japan. He hopes his voyage will raise funds for charities and challenge perceptions around disability.

The 33-year-old Blesma Member, whose bomb blast injuries while

serving as an 18 year old with The Rifles in Afghanistan resulted in the loss of both legs and his left hand, has used sailing for physical and mental recovery from his injuries.

“I’m feeling a bit of anxiety and apprehension because I want to do well for everyone,” said Craig, from Doncaster, who will become the first triple amputee to sail solo across the Pacific if he completes the route.

“It is 70 days at sea, and that is difficult for anyone. If I get sores on my legs, I won’t be able to wear my prosthetics, and if I hurt my right

hand I won’t be able to do much, so I have to mitigate these potential injuries that a non-disabled person may overcome quite easily.”

Craig, who has spent much of the last eight years living and sailing around the world on his boat with his wife, Renata and two young children, rediscovered his childhood passion for sailing as part of his recovery in 2009.

“I’m doing this for Blesma and Turn to Starboard,” he said. “Blesma was there immediately after I was injured, didn’t ask for anything in

**Above: Craig was given a stirring send-off in the UK before travelling to Mexico at the end of February**



## **“I’M FEELING A LITTLE BIT OF ANXIETY AND APPREHENSION BECAUSE I WANT TO DO WELL FOR EVERYONE”**

return, didn’t want any thanks and just said if there was anything I needed they would do their best to get it for me. Turn to Starboard helped me achieve my sailing qualifications and get the skill sets to attempt this voyage.

“Both organisations supported me in my darkest hours – they helped me find hope, showed me the potential of living a fulfilling life and inspired me to replace my missing limbs with ‘sea legs’. Hopefully, this voyage will show anyone facing a set back that through perseverance you have the ability to achieve anything you put your mind to.”

Tony Bloomfield, Blesma Operations Director, added: “All of us at Blesma wish Craig the adventure of a lifetime – he is doing so much to raise the profile of limbless and injured veterans, and we are delighted that Craig has chosen us as one of his charities.”

***Craig is hoping to raise £50,000 and donations can be made at <https://givestar.io/gs/mexico--japan-solo-sail-world-record>***



**Craig lost three limbs in a bomb blast in Afghanistan when he was just 18**

# Welcome



I hope you have all had a good start to the year and have submitted your preferences for the various national and international events we have lined up over the coming months. For those who like to stay a little closer to home, there are many options on offer through the regional Outreach programme. It was a great start to the year for Jaco Van Gass and Gregg Stevenson who were recognised in the New Year Honours List, with Jaco receiving an OBE and Gregg an MBE. Congratulations to them both.

Having recently consolidated the annual accounts for 2024, I can report that we have now been operating at a deficit for six years. On a slightly lighter note, there was a significant reduction in the deficit over the last 12 months and, hopefully, this will continue into 2025, keeping us on track with our 2024-2029 Five Year Strategic Plan. This year, you will also see a change in the publication of the Trustees’ Annual Report and Accounts for 2024. These will be placed on our website ahead of the AGM and a summary published in the summer magazine. You can request a paper copy of the full report from Head Office if you wish. You will, however, receive a copy of a new Impact Report that will be more engaging and outcome focused. This smaller publication will help us succinctly share our purpose and achievements with trusts, corporate donors and charity-related organisations, plus achieve a significant saving in time, process and money.

Other changes coming up include the implementation of a new membership database to improve our processes to better support Members. Plus, we will be strengthening the processes in how our valuable volunteers provide support to our Members. Practices are being updated to ensure compliance with safeguarding, data protection and risk management requirements. This will require a small amount of mandatory training online and a new Code of Conduct aimed at protecting our Members, volunteers, staff and other supporters. Our Volunteer Executive, Debbie Mayne, will contact all volunteers individually over the coming weeks to discuss any changes.

The tenth anniversary of the cross-Channel swim was postponed last year due to the weather and is due to take place in July. One of the swimmers, Steve White, was shortlisted to the final 10 for the World Open Water Swimming Awards 2024. This is a huge accolade; congratulations Steve!

Enjoy this edition of the magazine and I look forward to seeing many of you at the AGM and Members’ Weekend in June.

**Vivienne Buck CBE**  
**Chief Executive**





First Minister Eluned Morgan MS meets Member Paul Thomas



## First Minister of Wales visits amputee veterans

**T**he First Minister of Wales, Eluned Morgan MS, visited Morriston Hospital's Artificial Limb and Appliance Centre ahead of Remembrance Sunday to speak to Blesma Members.

The purpose-built centre, opened in 2012, is one of three such facilities in Wales, alongside others in Wrexham and Cardiff, that together help some 4,000 amputees.

"What's been great, here in Morriston Hospital, is seeing the support that [veterans] are given when they have lost limbs, and the wraparound care that's absolutely appreciated," Ms Morgan said.

Prosthetic Manager, Peter McCarthy, showed the First Minister around.

"We are such a specialised service that sometimes we are overlooked, so it's nice that the First Minister recognised our importance, especially in Remembrance week," said Peter. "Some of our patients

lost their limbs serving our country, so it was poignant.

"We're an exclusive service, and we provide amputees with every aspect of what they need. We have psychologists, prosthetists, physiotherapists, all aspects of a multi-disciplinary team – including a surgeon and doctors – all under one roof."

Amongst the veterans who chatted with Ms Morgan was triple amputee and war veteran, Paul Thomas (above). The 70 year old from Neath, who served in the Welsh Guards before being caught in an IRA bomb blast, was instrumental in setting up the centre.

"It's very, very important. It's a support network," he said. "When you have an artificial limb, it doesn't last forever. It needs renewing. You will grow, it needs repairing. The team is there for you. You just ring up, make an appointment and

you come in straight away, it's done more or less immediately."

Terri Hunt, who served in the Royal Army Medical Corps, was similarly full of praise for the service.

"I've been coming here for almost 18 years," said Terri, who is a single-leg amputee. "Having the continuity of staff and familiar faces, from low level up to the consultants, makes the journey a lot smoother mentally and physically."

Falklands War veteran Steve Fisher also chatted to the First Minister: "I've been coming here for about 32 years. This place is absolutely amazing," said Steve. "I go to the reception staff and ask to see a doctor, they sort that out. Then I see the limb fitters, I see the physio people here, I see the nurses for bandages and cream, I see occupational therapists. I have also seen the psychologists for many months.

"They are amazing because they address post-traumatic stress, pain, depression... I have nothing but good things to say about them."

*This is an edited version of an article that was written by Swansea Bay Health Board*





# Can you help with a water activities research study?

**B**lesma Members are being invited to take part in a research project that will look at the effects of open water-based activities on the lives of injured military veterans.

The study aims to highlight the wide-ranging holistic effects of sports such as scuba diving, sailing, surfing, kayaking and swimming and how they may be more accessible and practical than land-based activities for some injured military veterans.

“Open water-based, or blue, exercise enables a greater variety of veterans to participate in the physical activity-based adventure/recreational experiences that they may not be able to do on land,” said Akua Accra, a PhD student at the University of Essex, who is conducting the research.

“I want to really advocate for the blue space environment as an inclusive opportunity for injured veterans to participate in their activities of choice, whether that is scuba diving, surfing

or something else. There are so many opportunities for these activities that cater to the different wants and needs of veterans.

“I don’t think that current research has explored the true effects of these interventions and how they impact on the

body and the mind, and can result in real changes in participants’ lives.”

Akua, who is an NHS occupational therapist, is looking for volunteers to be interviewed via any online platform about their experiences with any water-based activity.

If requested, any input

can be given anonymously.

“It will be valuable to have the input from Blesma Members and it will help highlight the value of these activities so they can be made more widely available to both veterans and the general population recovering from serious injury,” added Akua.

**To take part in the research, contact Akua by email at [aa21667@essex.ac.uk](mailto:aa21667@essex.ac.uk)**



## News in brief

### WOODWORK WORKSHOP IS WORKING WONDERS

Blesma Members have been digging into an opportunity to enhance their woodwork skills and enjoy a social event at a workshop run by veterans for veterans.

The monthly visit to Dig In, in Preston, is a get-together as well as a chance to use machinery and tools to create items such as bird tables, planters, soldier silhouettes and wine racks.

“Members go along and make whatever they wish using the machinery and tools, and they really enjoy their time there,” said Catherine Green, Blesma Outreach Officer North West, who organises the activity.

“The Dig In staff are very knowledgeable and offer advice on the best way to do things. It is a great way to learn and meet other Members and veterans.”

Dig In, which is run by people from the military and blue light communities and veterans, also offers gardening, photography and stone masonry programmes.

### SECURE YOUR PLACE AT A POPULAR EVENT

The Association has places available for participants at the Paris Marathon (13 April), the Maldon Mud Race (04 May), The Great North Run (07 September), the Berlin Marathon (21 September) and the Dublin Marathon (26 October).

“We are so lucky to have people who want to run and raise funds for Blesma, and we are delighted to have secured places at these amazing events,” said Abbie-Louise Thomas, Community and Events Fundraising Manager.

**Visit the events page on the Blesma website to sign up or email [fundraising@blesma.org](mailto:fundraising@blesma.org)**



## Mully able to walk into his retirement party just months after amputation

**M**ember Mark Mulryan showed his powers of recovery by striding into his retirement party in a tuxedo just months after being fitted with a prosthetic leg. The 57 year old, who was forced to retire from his police role after a knee operation caused complications that led to the amputation of his right leg above the knee, raised £1,200 from the event at the Vale of Lune Rugby Club where he used to coach.

"A friend of mine, Alan Oliver, said why not make the retirement party a fundraiser for Blesma, and it was a great night all round," said Mark, from Morecambe, who served with the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and was a Combat Army Medic before joining the Lancashire Constabulary.

"I didn't want to walk into the party using crutches, and I'm delighted we were able to raise funds for Blesma. The Association has been a great help to me and my family, with Outreach Officer Catherine and BSO Amanda always there to help."



## NoLimits high performance sportswear by Mark Ormrod

Blesma Member and former Royal Marine Mark Ormrod has released a clothing range in collaboration with veteran-owned company ForceWear. The NoLimits range offers the perfect blend of practicality and purpose. Take a look at the full range now:



[www.forcewear.co.uk/collections/mark-ormrod](http://www.forcewear.co.uk/collections/mark-ormrod)





RAMC veteran Tony travelled 3,500km across India in a tuk tuk

## Robbed by monkeys on an unforgettable trip

**G**etting scammed by a rogue travel agent and robbed by aggressive monkeys doesn't sound like perfect holiday memories, but for ex-Staff Sergeant Tony Brown they were all part of a crazy, chaotic fundraising tuk tuk trip through India. The eventful 3,500km journey over 14 days involved braving lorries and buses travelling the wrong way down highways, and steering the temperamental three-wheeled vehicles through hair-raising traffic.

"It was totally chaotic from start to finish and an amazing experience," said Tony, who served in the Royal Army Medical Corps for 22 years. "We started off by getting scammed for a tourist trip that never materialised, got robbed by roadside monkeys and became minor celebrities on social media as people followed our journey."

Tony, 61, from Bristol, and fellow former RAMC warrant officer Michael Paver, along with their partners Claire and Paula, signed up for the challenge which saw 67 tuk tucks – traditional taxis that weave through the

teeming traffic – travel along the north to south route from Rajasthan to Kochi.

Each team had to deal with any problems they encountered on their own and could take any road to get to their destination.

"There's a book by Adam Branford about travelling through India by tuk tuk called *Cows, Curries and Chaos*, and we certainly had all of that," added



Tony, who raised £690 for Blesma on the expedition in January. "Being on those roads is not for the faint-hearted. We were followed and photographed – people asked to have selfies as they were following us on social media. A Bollywood singer ended up in the back of Mick's tuk tuk while he was filmed doing some dad dancing. It was an incredible experience and something you couldn't repeat."

"The people were fantastic and India is an amazing country. To enjoy that and raise money for a great charity was a perfect combination. We chose to raise money for Blesma because of the fantastic job it does for veterans."

### INSURANCE PROVIDER OFFERS BESPOKE FINANCIAL SERVICES TO VETERANS' COMMUNITY

Blesma has signed a partnership with leading military service insurance provider Trinity Insurance to open up a range of benefits for Members. Trinity, which has been supplying bespoke financial services to Armed Forces personnel for 25 years, is extending its offering, along with selected discounts, to the veterans' community.

"Veterans have never been treated as a customer group so can be disadvantaged by general policies. The moment you leave the Forces you have to navigate your way around a complicated landscape of different providers, none of whom are providing anything tailor-made," said Alan Richmond OBE, Trinity's chief operating officer and former Head of the British Army in Wales.

"We have great experience in the sector and can, where regulations allow, offer preferential rates and discounts on products that suit veterans. We also offer customers a chance to choose Blesma for a charity donation on certain products."

"We share Blesma's commitment to the veteran community and are trying to achieve the same result, which is to provide a better service and better outcomes for veterans."

**For more information on Trinity Insurance, visit [www.talktotrinity.com](http://www.talktotrinity.com)**



Trinity's COO Alan Richmond

In the spotlight

## Vinod Budhathoki



**V**inod served in 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles and was seriously injured on operations in 2010. He has been a Blesma Member for the last 15 years, and he will soon become the face of Blesma's new fundraising campaign, which has been timed to coincide with the run-up to the 80th anniversary of VE Day.

**Can we go back to the day you were injured, and can you tell us what you remember?**

It was my second tour of Afghanistan. I was clearing a path for my patrol and we had to cross a canal. Just before I stepped in the water there was a huge bang. There was dust everywhere, and then my legs felt as if they were burning; as if someone was wringing them out like wet clothes.

**Were you aware of your injuries right away?**

I could see that both my legs were smashed; my right leg was missing and although my left leg was still there, it was so smashed that I knew it would have to come off. I was conscious throughout the evacuation. My colleagues put tourniquets on me, gave me morphine and tried to stop the bleeding.

**What were you thinking at that time?**

I was thinking about my wife because she was pregnant with our first daughter, and I worried how she would be if I died.

**What was life like after your surgeries?**

After my amputations my life was upside down. I remember lying in the hospital bed in Selly Oak and no-one had told me how high up my amputations were.

I put my hand under the blanket, touched my legs and realised they were above the knee. I just cried.

But I never showed anyone that.

As a soldier, I just tried to be tough; I didn't want to show any weakness.

**IT IS GOOD TO MEET AND TALK TO OTHER MEMBERS; THAT'S WHEN ALL THE GOOD MEMORIES COME BACK**



**How did your wife cope with what happened to you?**

She is a very strong person and has played a huge role in my life. She has helped me to recover, to bring my life back to normal as much as possible. She told me she just wanted me to be alive no matter what.

**How did you find out about Blesma?**

I met someone from Blesma when I went to Headley Court. I didn't know anything about Civvy Street, so he showed me how to fill out all sorts of forms and documents. Blesma was very helpful to me right from the beginning of my recovery. Blesma has helped me a lot and has been a very big part of my life. It is good to meet and talk to other Members; that's when all the good memories come back.

**How do you look back on your injury?**

Honestly, I feel lucky because I lost so many friends who I served with in Afghanistan. I survived and now have so many opportunities in life, but they can't come back. We supported each other in a warzone, and that is a very, very tough place to be, but it is also the place where we became very close to each other.

**Tell us a little bit about your life now...**

I am very busy with family life. I have two daughters – they are aged 10 and 14 – and we spend a lot of time together as a family, going to the park and enjoying days out. They both compete in taekwondo, so a lot of my time is spent taking them to training and watching them in competitions.

**Have you done much with Blesma recently?**

Not really. I would like to go on the family glamping trip, so might apply for that next year. I've been doing quite a lot of blade running recently and am working up to being able to take part in a charity 5km event. I'd like to do that for Blesma.

**And what about being the face of the new fundraising campaign?**

I am always happy to get involved and support the Association in any way I can. Blesma has helped me so much in the past.





"I survived and  
now have so many  
opportunities in  
life," says Vinod





## Walking 100 miles in the mountains to raise awareness of homelessness

**F**ormer Irish Guardsman Platoon Sergeant Graham Fergus is getting ready to spend 10 days 'in the hills' with only a day's worth of supplies and no tent to raise awareness of homelessness and generate funds for Blesma.

Graham, who served in the Regular Army for 13 years before an 11-year stint as a Reservist, will travel 10 miles a day on foot and rough sleep in the Mourne Mountains as part of Operation HOME.

"Homelessness is not just about people being on the street, it is all around us," said Graham. "People are displaced all the time and become homeless because of various circumstances, and that puts them in desperate situations. They need help and support.

"Member Bryan Phillips is a good friend and fellow former Irish Guardsman, and



through him I've been aware of the work that Blesma does for veterans for some time, so I wanted to raise funds for it as well."

Graham, Head of Facilities for a digital technology company, will be hiking and walking around the Mourne Mountains, in County Down, from 11-20 April with just a sleeping bag, bivvy bag and a day of basic provisions, and will rely on the generosity of local communities to support him.

"There will be lots of challenges on the way – the elements and being on my own for a long time being the main ones," added Graham, 47. "But I will hopefully meet lots of people along the way who can help me spread the word about homelessness and the work of Blesma."

*If you would like to donate to Graham's challenge visit <https://shorturl.at/gcsF4>*

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**[/veterans-home-insurance](https://talktotrinity.com/veterans-home-insurance)**

\*For every policy sold we as Trinity, and the Underwriters of the policy, HCC International Insurance Company plc (trading as Tokio Marine HCC), will donate £5 to your chosen charity from those listed.





The ramp outside Mike's home has given him back his independence

## Mitie Group ramps up its support for Blesma

**M**itie Group PLC, which also contributes to Blesma's Christmas Hampers initiative (see p55), has provided its professional services and expertise in facilities and property management to help a veteran in Essex by constructing ramp access to his home.

For years, Mike Harvey, an amputee with significant mobility challenges, was effectively housebound due to the large steps at the front of his home. Without safe access, he was unable to leave his home independently, and so had to rely entirely on his wife and others to assist him.

Over time, this lack of mobility severely impacted his quality of life, limiting his freedom, social interactions and ability to engage with his local community.

"Partnering with Blesma on this project has been incredibly rewarding," said Mitie Group's Energy, Sustainability & Social Value Manager, Pranay Kavathekar.

"Seeing the difference this ramp has made

to Mike's life is truly inspiring. Blesma's impact on veterans' lives is profound, and we are honoured to be able to collaborate with the charity. We look forward to future opportunities to partner with them and support even more veterans."

For the first time in years, Mike can leave his home on his own, which has allowed him to restore his sense of independence and dignity. Simple activities like stepping outside for fresh air, visiting friends or attending appointments no longer feel like overwhelming challenges. The modification has given Mike's wife Jacky much-needed reassurance too, knowing that he can move safely without the risk of falls.

"I would like to say a big 'thank you' for arranging and financing the ramp and railings – it will make life so much easier for us," said Mike. "The work that has been done on the ramp was second to none. The men were friendly, caring and exceptionally hardworking. I'm very, very grateful!"

## CORIE CROWNED WORLD CHAMPION AND IS NOW AIMING FOR CLEAN SWEEP

CORIE MAPP HAS HURTLED INTO THE record books by claiming his first men's Para Bobsleigh World Championship gold medal just days after winning the overall World Cup title for a third time.

The 46-year-old former Household Cavalry officer edged to the title by a margin of just 0.3 seconds over four runs in St Moritz, Switzerland – grabbing the gold on his ninth attempt.

"Everything aligned. Mentally, I was in a great place, physically in fantastic shape and it was on a course I love," said Corie, from Swindon. "It's been a long time coming, and it is a fantastic feeling!"

"The World Cup title is over the entire season, and the World Championship is an Olympic-style competition over four runs."

Corie was injured by an IED blast in Afghanistan in 2010, which resulted in a double below-knee amputation. His rehabilitation journey included playing sitting volleyball for GB before turning to the snow, where his glittering career has included 60 medals across international bobsleigh events.

"I've always been encouraged to live, not just exist. Sport is important as it helped me through my rehab," added Corie. "There is no sense in putting yourself back together and doing nothing with that."

Corie is now focusing on training for what would be an unprecedented clean sweep of the European and World Championships, and World Cup in one season.



Words: Danny Buckland, Alana Warwick

## BLESMA BRIEFING

# How to take care of your stump

NO TWO AMPUTATIONS ARE THE SAME, SO WHEN IT COMES TO STUMP CARE FIND OUT WHAT WORKS FOR YOU SAYS BSO (PROSTHETICS) BRIAN CHENIER



**O**ne of the huge benefits of Blesma membership is the chance to share ideas and best practice with other Members who have been through similar situations. Members help Members to become experts – and they tell you how things really are, rather than how they should be in theory. I am grateful to Frank Bowen for his recent communication regarding stump care, and it prompted me to produce this Top Ten list. Caring for a residual limb is essential to prevent complications and promote healing, especially if you already use a prosthetic or are preparing for one. You should always seek specific advice from your prosthetist, nurse or GP if you have any questions or concerns.

### 1. KEEP YOUR STUMP CLEAN AND DRY

Gently wash your stump daily with mild soap and warm water. Avoid harsh scrubbing, and make sure to dry it thoroughly to prevent infection. Try using an anti-fungal wash several times a week – you can also clean your liner with it. Afterwards, dry yourself thoroughly and use an anti-fungal athlete's foot powder on both your stump and liner.

### 2. INSPECT YOUR STUMP DAILY

Be careful with cuts and bruises, and treat them immediately, otherwise you could have problems. Try mixing Savlon liquid into a bath – it's better than having a shower – and always treat even the smallest injuries with antiseptic. Watch for signs of infection like increased redness, warmth, swelling or sores. If you notice any of these, contact your GP immediately.

### 3. USE MOISTURISER FOR SKIN HEALTH

Apply a non-scented, alcohol-free lotion or skin care product to keep your skin healthy and prevent dryness or cracking. Avoid excessive moisture, as it can promote fungal infections. It's very easy to get in-growing hairs, which are a real pain and can be a problem if they get infected. The best solution is to use an exfoliating glove daily while washing to remove the dead skin that causes in-growing hairs.

### 4. AVOID TIGHT OR RESTRICTIVE CLOTHING

Wear loose, breathable clothing to avoid unnecessary pressure on your stump which can cause irritation or sores. Also avoid bandaging your stump too tightly.

### 5. EXERCISE AND MASSAGE

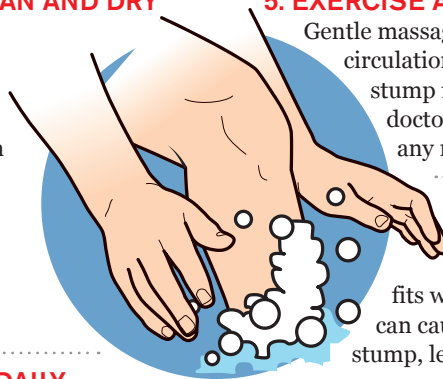
Gentle massage and exercise can improve circulation, reduce swelling and help with stump flexibility. Always consult your doctor or prosthetist before starting any new exercise routine.

### 6. USE A PROSTHESIS THAT FITS PROPERLY

Ensure that your prosthetic socket fits well and is comfortable. Poor fitting can cause irritation and sores on your stump, leading to infections or discomfort.

### 7. THINK OF THE FUTURE

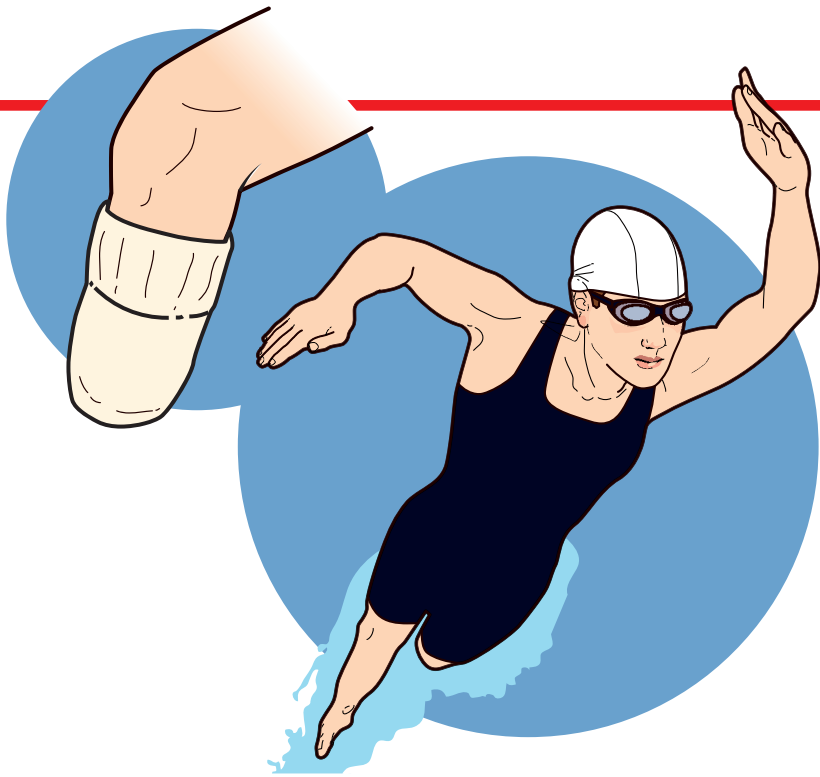
It is vitally important that you take care of the limbs you have because you rely on them that much more. If you've lost one leg, make sure you always wear decent shoes and keep your remaining leg strong by doing gentle but regular exercise. That will help to keep your hip and knee healthy as you get older.



“

**WATCH FOR SIGNS OF INFECTION SUCH AS INCREASED REDNESS, WARMTH, SWELLING OR SORES. IF YOU SEE ANY CONTACT YOUR GP**





## 8. AVOID EXCESSIVE SUN EXPOSURE

Prolonged sun exposure can damage the skin on your stump, leading to burns or irritation. If you are going to be out in the sun, apply a sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher to protect the skin.

## 9. MANAGE SWELLING

Elevate your stump whenever possible to reduce any swelling, especially after using your prosthetic for extended periods. You may need to use a compression garment if advised by your doctor. Maintaining a healthy diet and exercise routine should help to maintain the general size and shape of your stump.

## 10. STAY ON TOP OF APPOINTMENTS

Regularly visit your doctor, prosthetist, or therapist to monitor your stump's healing process as well as the fit of your prosthetic. Regular check-ups will help catch any issues early on.

These tips will help your stump stay in good condition and allow you to maintain optimal function, comfort and health. All the advice you'll get from everyone is great, but no two amputations are the same, so make sure you experiment and do what's best for your stump. Some people shave them, some don't, for example, and there are lots of different products that do different things. The key is to try a few and stick with the ones that work for you. And always follow your healthcare provider's specific recommendations.

*For more advice or information, please get in touch with Brian, BSO (Prosthetics) on 07796 715908 or email him at [bsoprosthetics@blesma.org](mailto:bsoprosthetics@blesma.org). If you would like to get in touch with your Support or Outreach Officer, their contact details can be found on p68*

**Gentle massage and exercise can improve circulation, reduce swelling and help with stump flexibility**

**“ALL THE ADVICE YOU'LL GET IS GREAT, BUT MAKE SURE YOU EXPERIMENT AND DO WHAT'S BEST FOR YOUR STUMP**

## GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR APPOINTMENT

**W**hen you visit your prosthetist, it's important to ask the right questions to ensure you get the best possible care and that your prosthesis is well-suited to your needs. Here are a few good ones to start with...

### IS MY PROSTHESIS FITTING PROPERLY?

It is essential to address any discomfort or pressure spots. A proper fit is crucial for comfort and function. If you're experiencing any discomfort or irritation, your prosthetist can provide tips on adjusting your fit or offer other solutions like padding or liner adjustments. They can also assess whether your prosthesis is aligned properly, and if there are any indicators you can look out for, such as wear patterns or discomfort.

### HOW OFTEN SHOULD I COME IN FOR ADJUSTMENTS OR CHECK-UPS?

Regular visits are vital, especially during the initial period of wearing your prosthesis. Having a schedule will help you to keep your prosthesis functioning well. If you're planning on doing sports, swimming, or other activities, your prosthetist can guide you on what your prosthesis can handle and recommend any modifications for your activity level and lifestyle.

### WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I EXPERIENCE PAIN, IRRITATION OR SORES?

Knowing how to address issues when they arise is important. Your prosthetist can advise on immediate steps and when to return for adjustments.

### WHAT'S THE PROCESS FOR GETTING A NEW PROSTHESIS OR UPGRADING ONE?

If you're in need of a new prosthesis, find out what that entire process looks like, including fitting, adjustments, and funding policy. Also, inquire about how often you may need a new one as your needs change.

### CAN YOU RECOMMEND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES OR SUPPORT?

Many prosthetists can recommend a wide variety of support groups, physical therapy options, or other resources to help you adjust to life using a prosthesis. By asking these sorts of questions, you can build a better relationship with your prosthetist as well as any support groups, and ensure that your prosthetic is working to its fullest potential for your comfort and needs.



Anna Maxwell (left)  
and Charmaine Healy



Andrew Rayner takes  
in the stunning views

## Blue skies and black runs in the Alps

**T**hrill-seeking Blesma Members have hurtled down an Olympic bobsleigh course in an adrenaline-busting finale to the annual ski trip in the French Alps. Fastened in securely and under expert guidance, eight intrepid daredevils experienced speeds of up to 50mph as they raced around the track's stomach-churning bends.

The 16-strong party, led by Support Officer Pat Donnachie, had flown from London to Geneva and then travelled on by coach to La Plagne in France to enjoy a full week of winter activities in January.

Member Charmaine Healy, a Royal Signals veteran who was injured in Afghanistan in 2010, was on her second Blesma ski trip and had to shake off the rust on the beginners' slopes at the start of the week.

"We were divided into small groups to meet our instructors and get issued with our skiing equipment and sit skis," said Charmaine, who is an Invictus Games medallist. "After wrestling our prosthetics

into ski boots, we headed to the slopes and I soon realised that everything I had learned last year had flown out of my head!

"After a few runs, things started to come back to me though, and I remembered just how physical skiing is, but I was loving it. We had lunch on the hotel veranda where the views were amazing and exchanged stories about how we were getting on. We had a great group and we all had different levels of skiing experience, but that didn't stop anyone from having a great time."

Members made the most of the extensive skiing terrain and expert tuition on offer,

**"THE BOBSLEIGH COURSE WAS ONE OF THE SCARIEST AND MOST EXHILARATING THINGS I HAVE EVER DONE"**

and they also got to spend time away from the slopes exploring the town.

"It was great fun being in small groups and getting to try different ski runs," added Charmaine, who also tried snowboarding for the first time on the trip. "None of us wanted the week to be over. We learned so much from our instructors, and it was nice to see people making bonds and growing in confidence – and to see new Members get a taste of what Blesma is all about was a real highlight. Eight of us even tried out the bobsleigh course, and it is one of the scariest and most exhilarating things I have ever done!

"I'd like to thank the support staff and Activities Team who made it possible, along with our BSO Pat who was always there to make sure everything ran smoothly. It was an amazing trip, and I would definitely recommend it to anyone who's thinking of giving it a go."

*Turn to p26 to discover a whole range of activities that you can sign up for in 2025*





## Fundraising

### COMMEMORATING ARMISTICE DAY WITH THE REMEMBRANCE 11K

The annual Remembrance 11K, which unites the Blesma community with a series of self-generated sponsored runs and walks to commemorate Armistice Day, raised more than £3,800 last November from 23 participants. A big thank you goes to all who took part.



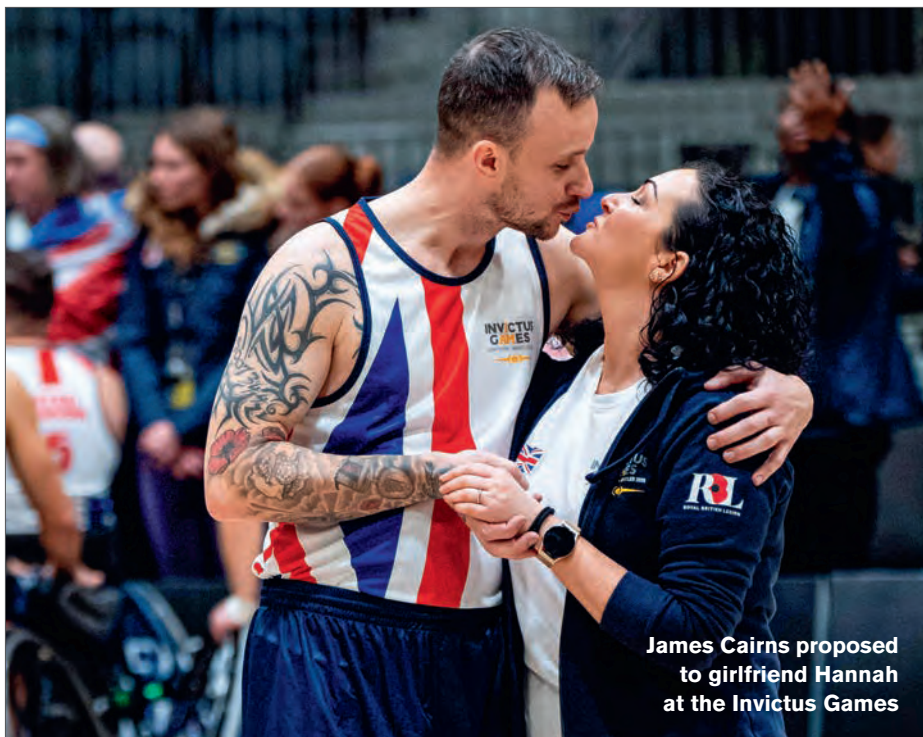
### LOVE A GOOD CHEER? WE'VE GOT JUST THE THING FOR YOU!

Get ready to shout loud for Blesma! The Association is looking for volunteers to come together at 'cheer stations' at two huge events to give our fundraisers a morale boost as they tackle demanding courses. Blesma has managed to secure designated points outside The Tower of London for the London Landmarks Half Marathon on 06 April and at Mile 17 for the London Marathon on 27 April. **For more details and to volunteer, please contact [fundraising@blesma.org](mailto:fundraising@blesma.org)**

### BLESMA STEPS INTO 2025 IN GRAND FASHION WITH BIG CHALLENGE

The Blesma Step Into 2025 Challenge to walk or run 50 miles during January to support injured veterans raised more than £1,000. A big thank you to all who took part, amongst them William Ellwood, who raised £420 from 26 donors.





James Cairns proposed to girlfriend Hannah at the Invictus Games

## Golds and diamonds for Team Blesma at Invictus

**B**lesma Members returned from the Invictus Games in Canada with a hatful of medals and lasting memories of being part of the UK team.

Former Royal Irish Regiment soldier Andy Allen bagged medals in all four of his events at the nine-day tournament in February, which attracted more than 500 competitors from 23 nations.

"It was a phenomenal Games. The camaraderie, the banter and the feeling of being together and supporting each other were so strong," said Andy, who played in the UK wheelchair rugby team that was edged out of the gold medal in a thrilling final against France. "It is something you miss after service so any chance of rekindling that spirit is really welcome."

Fellow Blesma Member Mac McLaren, a former Royal Highland Fusilier who captained the team, said: "Invictus was everything I hoped it would be and more. Seven of our 10 players had never played wheelchair rugby until six months ago, so silver was an incredible achievement.

"It was fantastic to see them gel as a team, and it was a proud moment to see them storm into the final."

The wheelchair rugby games were all played on the same day, with the UK defeating New Zealand and Italy in pool games and then beating Australia in the semi-final before losing 14-19 to France.

Mac, from Gillingham, added: "We were up against a team that had been together for two years, so it was a great performance."

The 46 year old is now planning to pursue an ambassadorial role, mentoring veterans through future Invictus Games.

There was another gold for Blesma when James Cairns (above) proposed to girlfriend Hannah at the start of the pool games. The 35-year-old former Yorkshire Regiment soldier, whose right leg was amputated after he was shot in Afghanistan in 2011, had the crowds cheering as he proposed on court.

James, from Holmfirth in West Yorkshire, who also competed in biathlon and swimming, said: "This is my gold medal moment!" after Hannah accepted.

## TRUCK PULL PUSHES MARK INTO RECORD BOOKS AGAIN

MARK ORMROD HAS ADDED ANOTHER world record to his formidable tally by becoming the shortest person to pull a 2.5-tonne truck over 100 metres.

The former Royal Marines Commando had to dig deep to generate the power to move the vehicle, steered by his 11-year-old daughter Evelyn, along an icy athletics track in Tavistock, Devon, in an effort that took 17 minutes in January.

The 41-year-old triple amputee, who is 4ft 3ins tall, was making his second attempt at the record after narrowly failing in a pull in Essex in September.

"It was tough to get momentum, and because the track was icy I was slipping a lot," said Mark, who has devised and set several world records to highlight positivity after disability. "It was difficult to train specifically for the event as you cannot replicate it without the truck. We failed in September but then worked on a few things, had a trial go two weeks prior to get over the mental hurdle that it was possible, and then went for the record."

Mark, who fronts Blesma's TV advertising campaign for legacy donations, is a Trustee of REORG; a charity that uses functional fitness to support the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of military and emergency services personnel.







Hari, photographed at his home before his Everest expedition

# Hari is two summits away from historic Grand Slam

**H**ari Budha Magar has become the first double above-knee amputee to summit Mount Aconcagua. The 45-year-old former Royal Gurkha Rifles corporal now has just two mountains left to complete the Grand Slam of climbing the highest peak on each of the seven continents.

Hari, who conquered Mount Everest two years ago, reached the 6,961-metre peak of Aconcagua in the Andes in late February to add to his list of world records.

"It wasn't the most technically difficult mountain, but it was physically and mentally exhausting as I climb three times slower

than a non-disabled mountaineer," said Hari, from Canterbury in Kent, who was injured by an IED in Afghanistan in 2010.

"The summit is a long, hard ascent with very limited rescue options. We had to set up a special camp because of the length of the trail and sheer exhaustion."

Mount Aconcagua is the highest mountain outside the Himalayas and the second tallest in the Grand Slam. Hari is aiming to tackle the two remaining peaks – Puncak Jaya in Indonesia and Mt Vinson in Antarctica, later this year. The feat has been achieved by only 500 mountaineers.

## STEVE BOXES CLEVER AND RAISES FUNDS

STEVE SUTTON STEPPED BACK INTO the ring after a 32-year break and raised a knockout £5,800 for Blesma. The 51 year old, who served in 9 Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers, got the gloves on again in tribute to his groomsman Alan 'Yorkie' Craven, a Blesma Member who was given the last rites after an operational parachute jump accident.

"Yorkie and I served together for nine years and I was there at his bedside when everyone thought that was the end," said Steve, from Waterloo, Merseyside. "Thankfully, he made it, but he suffered multiple injuries and had to have his left leg amputated below the knee.

"He has faced a lot, but it was great to have him at my wedding last year and at ringside supporting me. Over the years, I've seen the incredible support he has been given by Blesma, both for his physical and mental wellbeing, and I wanted to do something to give back."



## News in brief

### NEW YEAR HONOURS FOR BLESMA PAIR

Two of Blesma's gold medallists from the Paris Paralympics have been recognised in the New Year Honours List.

Gregg Stevenson (below left), a former Royal Engineer Commando who won gold in the PR2 mixed double sculls in the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris, was awarded an MBE for services to rowing.

Meanwhile, Jaco van Gass, a 38-year-old ex-Paratrooper who won two golds and a bronze in cycling in Paris to bring his Paralympic medal tally up to five, was made an OBE, having been awarded an MBE in 2022.



### GOLF CLUB GOES A FAIR WAY FOR BLESMA

Halifax Golf Club proved itself to be a driving force for Blesma late last year by raising £7,750 for the Association from two Remembrance Day cup tournaments in which Members were invited to play.

The club even funded Blesma Members' accommodation and food for the entire weekend, which attracted a great deal of support from the golf club's members and their families.

One of the event organisers, Craig Smith, whose nephew is Blesma Member Troy Conner, is planning another event this November.



# Newsfeed



**Prayers, readings and singing:  
Christmas wouldn't be the same  
without a Blesma carol service**

Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Brian Chenier





Chelmsford Cathedral saw  
300 people attend the Blesma  
carol service in December

## Blesma carol service an “important part of the area’s Christmas events”

**C**helmsford Cathedral rang out once again at Christmas to the sound of music and choirs at the Blesma carol service. The event, which has become a calendar highlight for the Association, took place last year on 12 December.

The cathedral, parts of which date back to Norman times, was packed full as 300 guests enjoyed a unique evening of carols, performances, readings and prayers.

Soprano singer Naomi Kilby was once again a star attraction alongside the 30-strong Sound Collective Choir; a thriving modern adult choir based in Essex. Later in the service, Blesma’s Finance and Support Director, Boston Mwense and fellow St Albans Roman Catholic Church parishioner, David Bousho sang a duet.

The congregation, which was made up of Blesma Members and staff, local organisations and charities, and members of the local community listened to a reading

from Member Simon Collinson and prayers read by Reverend Peter King MBE CF.

“It was a fantastic evening. The concert has become incredibly popular in recent years. The tickets were taken very quickly,” said Abbie-Louise Thomas, Blesma’s Community and Events Fundraising Manager. “The service was very moving, and the excellent performances were enjoyed by everyone. We finished off with mulled wine and mince pies, and people had the chance to meet Blesma’s veterans. The carol service has become an important part of the area’s Christmas events, and its popularity continues to grow.

“It is always a memorable evening, and it is inspiring to see people from all walks of life connecting with Blesma Members and getting to know more about the Association, as well as celebrating Christmas.”

Colonel Leona Barr-Jones DL VR, East Anglia Reserve Forces and Cadets Association, commented: “We gathered for the annual Blesma carol service in Chelmsford to celebrate the festive season and show support for our veterans. A huge thank you to everyone who joined us, with a special shout-out for The Sound Collective Choir, Boston Mwense, David Bousho and Naomi Kilby for their performances.”

**“THE SERVICE WAS MOVING, AND THE PERFORMANCES WERE ENJOYED BY EVERYONE. IT IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE AREA’S CHRISTMAS EVENTS”**

# The Blesma Storytelling and Wellbeing Programme

The Blesma Storytelling and Wellbeing Programme (BSWP) offers Blesma Members a series of high-quality storytelling and creative workshops, both online and in person.

Further details can be found on the Activities page of the Blesma website or see below for some of the upcoming workshops.



What's  
coming  
up!

## APRIL

**Bristol, 01-02 April** A two-day sculpture workshop with Simon Watson

## MAY

**Online, 22 May** Professional Development:  
Managing challenging conversations with Al Nedjari

## JUNE

**Online, 09 and 16 June** Creative writing with Kate Beales (two-part)

**Oxford, 25 June** Keep It Fresh: storytelling training for experienced  
storytellers with Corinne Micallef

## JULY

**Birmingham, 10 July** Comedy Improvisation with Alice Palmer

BSWP workshops are fully accessible and open to the entire Blesma membership unless stated otherwise (subject to completion of an onboarding process and space availability). The Drive Project ensures that the workshops are safe, inclusive and respectful environments with clear guidelines so that everyone is able to get the most out of their experience.

To find out more, or to book any of the workshops, please email [activities@blesma.org](mailto:activities@blesma.org)

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



## ENJOY BELTING OUT A TUNE AT HOME? THEN THIS IS FOR YOU!

OUTREACH OFFICER SOUTH AMY Barnes, a professionally trained singer, is leading a group of Members who join her online for breathing exercises followed by renditions of hits ranging from pop classics to famous show tunes. The lyrics are displayed on a screen and Members stay on mute as they sing along in the hour-long class, which is held at 1.30pm every other Monday.

"Singing is a proven way to improve your wellbeing, and the lung exercises are great for your physical health," said Amy, who is also a Singing for Breathing practitioner. "It is great fun and a great way to meet people from all over the UK. What better way to start the week?"

Lynn Smith gets a lot out of the sessions: "Amy takes us through a few warm-up exercises, and during this time we chat and get to know each other. Then we all mute ourselves while Amy shares the screen so we can see the words of popular



songs, which we then sing with Amy leading us," she said.

Member Steve Binns is also an avid fan: "Who doesn't enjoy belting out a tune when no-one can hear? I think the social aspect is also very important; chatting to Members from other areas and supporting each other in a relaxed atmosphere."

Meanwhile, the Blesma Storytelling and Wellbeing Programme put on a singing and songwriting workshop for Members in January. Turn to p32 for more.

*If you would like more information about Amy's online choir, get in touch with her at [outreachofficersouth@blesma.org](mailto:outreachofficersouth@blesma.org)*



Paul is the UK and World Para champion in Brazilian jiu-jitsu

## Martial arts masterclass at Members' Weekend

**M**embers are being offered the chance to try Brazilian jiu-jitsu, courtesy of Blesma's reigning UK and World Para champion Paul Skivington. Paul will be running a taster session at Members' Weekend in the summer, and the mat will be open to anyone who fancies giving the grappling martial art a try under his close supervision.

"There is no striking involved – it is about developing grappling skills," said Paul, 47, who served with Royal 9 Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers before losing his left leg above the knee in a motorbike accident.

"It is a fantastic sport and I've got so much from it since I started six years ago. I'm keen to share my passion for jiu-jitsu with other Members as I'm sure they'll also get a lot from it.

"My message is have a go at the training session. It's about learning new skills, and the fitness from it is fantastic because it is so physically intense. The beauty is that it

is a very inclusive sport, and you can still enjoy it as an amputee. The session will be fun, you can start from a seated position and no-one will get hurt. You can tap out at any time you feel uncomfortable, and I think many Members will be surprised what they can get from it.

"The martial art has changed my life, and I'm grateful for the support I've had from Blesma to pursue it so now I want to share that."

Paul, from Dorset, is in training to defend his UK title in London and his double gold title at the 2025 World Championships in Abu Dhabi later this year.



**PLEASE NOTE:**  
This year's Members' Weekend will run from 28-30 June (not from 27 June as some previous communications have stated).

# Letters

HAVE YOU GOT SOMETHING THAT YOU WANT TO GET OFF YOUR CHEST OR SHARE WITH YOUR FELLOW MEMBERS? **SEND YOUR LETTER TO [EDITOR@BLESMA.ORG](mailto:EDITOR@BLESMA.ORG)**

## FIRST TIME SAILING BUT NOT THE LAST!

EIGHT AMPUTEES SAILING AROUND the Mediterranean and Ionian Seas in Greece. What is the worst that could happen? I was fortunate to have the amazing opportunity to participate in the Greek Regatta last September.

At first, I felt slightly apprehensive at the thought of sailing with seven strangers. However, I honestly felt like I had known everyone for several years just after the first few hours. It's certainly one of the pros of us all being ex-military; similarly minded people with similar injuries and experiences – I found it a huge support and certainly one of the highlights.

On the first day, everyone was feeling excited and raring to go, we flew from Heathrow to Preveza International Airport which was only a short drive to Vounaki Beach Club. Vounaki was our first and main location, where we were introduced to the beautiful sailing yachts that we would spend the next week living on.

The Vounaki Beach Club was beautiful, nestled within the main harbour area next to the glistening Ionian Sea. Not only did it have excellent facilities, an abundance of amazing views, and blissful sunsets and sunrises over the mountains in the distance, but the staff were very welcoming. We were spoilt for choice with a huge range of activities such as dinghy sailing, kayaks and swimming pools, as well as a massage and spa facility.

We were split into two groups – as the yachts accommodated four people – and were shown around our yachts. I had no sailing experience but surprisingly, after a few hours of familiarising myself with the yacht, I soon understood how everything worked. And if I was unsure



of something I was soon educated by the vast experience we had in our crews.

After the first day, it struck me how easily some Members manoeuvred around the yachts, limbs missing or not! But it is important to note that some Members may struggle with manoeuvrability, as the boats are not completely accessible for everyone.

Once we had everything we needed for a few days we set off on our first sail, heading towards an island called Meganisi.



En route, we were taught the basics of sailing, including man-overboard drills. When we arrived at Meganisi we had to work together as a team to dock correctly, then we got out the planks and explored the island, finding several traditional Greek restaurants. We all met in one of the restaurants and were treated to a beautiful Greek supper. The evening was very sociable, with the option to have some time alone if needed.





I wasn't sure how I would sleep on the yacht, but it turned out that after a long day at sea I slept like a baby – despite the huge thunderstorm we briefly had over our heads!

The second day we headed for Ithaca, and I was overwhelmed by how beautiful the scenery was along the way. We had plenty of time to stop at different locations on the way to swim and explore some of the wildlife. One thing I didn't expect to do was swim with pigs! We found an island that had wild pigs on the shoreline and yes, they swam! They were so amazing, I wanted to adopt one and take it back on the boat with me!

Every day, we sailed to a new island and not the typical destinations you might go to on a resort-style holiday. This is when I really enjoyed the freedom of sailing!

As someone completely new to all things sailing, I became really interested really

quickly. I learned a lot about all the fundamentals of sailing including all the amazing sailing charities out there that fund sailing qualifications for injured Service men and woman.

This wasn't just a sailing holiday, it was one of the best experiences I've had! I was disappointed to realise that all these great and amazing opportunities have always been available for me as a Blesma Member, but that it has taken me 10 years to get the self confidence to participate in one. This was all to do with my own mindset.

I understand there are a lot of people who share similar anxieties, but please be assured that there are huge opportunities and experiences out there for us to participate in which are funded by the Association. Please don't miss out and make the mistake of putting things off. You will always be in safe hands with Blesma.

**Jonny Holloway**

## A QUICK CUP OF TEA TURNS INTO A REAL REUNION

I'd just been for a heart check-up at my local hospital, and with time to kill afterwards I went for a cup of tea. Sitting opposite me was a bloke of a similar age who looked familiar.

Me being me, I went for it. *Are you, were you, did you, remember such and such...*

It turned out we both got on the 07.30 train from Chichester one cold February morning back in 1976 en route to the Selection Centre at Sutton Coldfield. After three days of selection training we were sent to Woolwich and were in the same battery, same troop, same section until we passed out that June.



**John Elvin in St Kitts last year**

We were good mates, but after our leave we went to different regiments and never set eyes on each other again. It turns out, after service he lived in the next village from me and worked until retirement in my village. He socialises locally, but we've never crossed paths.

I could have stayed longer and reminisced for ages but my bus was due, so we departed as if we saw each other on a regular basis. All very strange, but what a joy to bring back 40-odd years just like that!

I know where he lives now, and where his favourite watering hole is, so no excuses. I might just be back in there with my old mate from years gone by sharing a glass of something. Cheers!

**John Elvin**

# Activities

WHETHER IT'S CATCHING UP WITH OLD FRIENDS, MAKING NEW ONES OR HANGING OUT WITH THE FAMILY, THERE'S LOADS TO DO WITH BLESMA IN 2025 – AND IT'S ALL ABSOLUTELY FREE!

**F**rom glamping in Somerset to skiing in Colorado, cycling in New York to fitness in Spain, with lots of other amazing activities in between, Blesma is giving Members the chance to have all kinds of experiences this year – and they're all free! Take a look at the choices on the next six pages and apply online at [www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org) or by emailing the Activities Team on [aecal@blesma.org](mailto:aecal@blesma.org).

Please be aware that dates are subject to change and that Members are expected to share a room on each event unless otherwise specified, or the Activities Team have been contacted beforehand with viable reasons. As part of the selection process, you will be required to respond to a confirmation of interest email sent near to the deadline. Failure to respond will result in your placement to the reserve list.

Why not sign up to Blesma's Activities email newsletter to stay up to date with

all the upcoming events and date changes? Please email [eventscal@blesma.org](mailto:eventscal@blesma.org) and ask to be added to the subscription list.

## SRNYC

**Location:** New York

**Date:** 14-21 July

**Application deadline:** 15 March

A prestigious event in the cycling calendar and a privilege to be invited back year after year. Cycle with the Wounded Warrior Project in and around New York for three days. The event finishes with a huge celebration. This is an absolute must for any passionate cyclist looking for a rewarding challenge.

### Who can apply?

Any Member who can use some form of adaptive bike, which will be supplied by the Wounded Warrior Project. Please be aware that the weather will be hot, and you will be expected to cycle more than 70 miles in three days.



**Requirements:** You must be able to enter the USA (ESTA). Your passport must be valid for the length of your stay.

## COUPLES' CHRISTMAS MARKETS

**Location:** Copenhagen

**Date:** 04-08 December

**Application deadline:** 01 August

Get into the Christmas spirit with a festive weekend break in Copenhagen. Experience the charm of this vibrant city, where traditional holiday customs blend with the Christmas markets. Soak up the festive atmosphere, relax with your partner and enjoy the company of fellow Blesma couples as you explore the sights, sounds and seasonal cheer of Copenhagen.

### Who can apply?

Any Member and their spouse/partner.

**Requirements:** You must have at least three months' validity left on your passport from the day you return home.







Apply online now at  
[blesma.org](https://blesma.org) or by emailing  
[eventsca@blesma.org](mailto:eventsca@blesma.org)

# Have fun on the slopes with our wintersports

## INTRO TO WINTERSPORTS

**Location:** Manchester

**Date:** 20 August

**Application deadline:** 01 July

Learn to ski with Disabled Ski Sports UK. You'll have the opportunity to try a variety of different snow sports in the safe environment of the Tamworth SnowDome. These sessions are a great way to discover the discipline that suits you before taking part in our wintersports events. Please note: these introductory sessions are mandatory for anyone who hasn't skied in the last three years.

### Who can apply?

This activity is open to everyone. Please note: if you have had surgery in the past 12 months you will require clearance from your doctor. There is a weight limit of 16 stone. Please also be aware that in general circumstances, we do not allow carers to ski.

## COLORADO SKI SPECTACULAR

**Location:** Breckenridge

**Date:** December (exact dates TBC)

**Application deadline:** 01 July

This annual event run by Disabled Sports USA, is one of the world's biggest and best ski spectacles for all adaptive wintersports. The perfect week to have fun on the slopes and enjoy all that the



ski spectacular has to offer. Monoski, snowboarding, stand-up skiing and three-track are all available.

### Who can apply?

Most injury types can be catered for on the slopes. 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). Your passport must be valid for the length of your stay.

## WINTERSPORTS LA PLAGNE 2026

**Location:** La Plagne, France

**Date:** January 2026 (exact dates TBC)

**Application deadline:** 15 August

Our fully adaptive ski week returns to Blesma. Working with adaptive ski instructors, the event will include trying out a variety of adaptive wintersports. This event is open to both beginners and those who are more advanced.

### Who can apply?

Anyone. Please note: generally, we do not allow carers to ski.

**Requirements:** Your passport must have an expiry date of at least three months after the day you return home.



# Activities

## WIDOWS AND SENIORS ACTIVITIES WEEKS

**Location:** Norfolk

**Date:** Widows Week: 01-05 September

Seniors Week: 15-19 September

**Application deadline:** 01 May

Set on the beautiful Norfolk coast, this event offers something for everyone. Whether you're after a bit of adventure or a spot of relaxation, there are plenty of activities to enjoy. There's always something going on, whether you want to get active, explore nature or spend time relaxing with fellow Members.

**Who can apply?**

Seniors Activities Weeks are open to Members and Widow(er)s. Widows Activities Weeks are for Widows only.

## ADVANCED CYCLING CHALLENGE

**Location:** Scotland

**Date:** 21-27 September

**Application deadline:** 01 May

Push your limits with our seven-day cycling challenge. You'll be able to test yourself with fast-paced cycling, long distances and steep hills, all while enjoying the breathtaking sights and sounds of the English countryside. This is the perfect opportunity to test your levels of endurance and experience the beauty of the British landscape in a truly exhilarating way.

**Who can apply?**

Advanced cyclists who own their own bike.

## FAMILY GLAMPING WEEKEND

**Location:** TBC

**Date:** October (exact dates TBC)

**Application deadline:** 01 June

Engage with other Members and their families while you spend time in the great outdoors. Spouses, partners, carers, children and grandchildren are all welcome.

**Who can apply?**

Any Member with a family of between two and six people (i.e. the Member and up to five others). Please note that whilst there is no minimum age to apply, some activities are restricted to an age limit.

## FAMILIES ACTIVITIES

**Location:** Norfolk

**Date:** 29 August – 01 September

**Application deadline:** 01 April

An opportunity to spend quality time with



your family, enjoying activities like crafts, sports and family-friendly games.

**Who can apply?**

Any Member with a family of between two and six people (i.e. the Member and up to five others). Please note that whilst there is no minimum age to apply, some activities are restricted to an age limit.

## COUPLES' WEEKEND LIVERPOOL

**Location:** Liverpool

**Date:** 18-21 July

**Application deadline:** 15 March



Members will enjoy the cultural heritage that Liverpool has to offer. Liverpool has been voted one of the friendliest cities in the UK, 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 and their spouse/partner.

## COOKERY RETREAT

**Location:** East Yorkshire

**Date:** 15-18 August

**Application deadline:** 15 April

An exciting opportunity for Members (and their partners) to try something new. You will take part in cooking classes that will show you how to create healthy, delicious meals that are fun to prepare.

**Who can apply?**

Any Member, with or without their spouse/partner.

## DAVE LEWAN MEMORIAL FISHING MATCH

**Location:** Newcastle-under-Lyme

**Date:** June/July (exact dates TBC)

**Application deadline:** 15 March

The focus will be on relaxing, socialising, and taking part in a bit of friendly competition in the beautiful Whitmore Estate in the heart of Staffordshire.

**Who can apply?**

Both beginners and seasoned anglers alike are welcome to attend.





## Discover the thrill of scuba diving

### TRY DIVES

**Location:** Lord Wandsworth College, Hampshire

**Date:** 19 July and August (exact date TBC) for those selected for the scuba diving exped.

**Application deadline:** 15 March

Learn to dive with experienced dive instructors in the safety of dive pools whilst working towards your PADI qualifications. It is mandatory to attend one of these before attending scuba diving in Egypt.

**Who can apply?**

Any Member, subject to medical clearance.

### SCUBA DIVING

**Location:** Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt

**Date:** 10-19 October

**Application deadline:** 15 May

A great chance to enjoy some of the world's best scuba diving. You can dive for fun or work to pick up diving qualifications. If you've never dived before or need some refresher training, a team of highly qualified instructors will take you through everything you need to know at a weekend training session prior to the trip to the Red Sea. Complete novices are welcome.

**Who can apply?**

The hotel and boat are both adapted for wheelchair users. However, individuals must be able to get themselves in and out of the water subject to medical clearance.

**Requirements:** You must be able to enter Egypt, and your passport should be valid for six months from the date you arrive.

Apply online now at  
[blesma.org](https://blesma.org) or by emailing  
[eventsca@blesma.org](mailto:eventsca@blesma.org)

## Virtual events: No need to leave home

### TAI CHI

**Location:** Virtual

**Date:** 20 Oct – 22 Dec (10-week course)

**Application deadline:** 06 October

Participate in weekly online Tai Chi classes and explore the benefits of this moving meditation. Studies show that Tai Chi improves physical health and fitness, and benefits our brains.

**Who can apply?**

This activity is suitable for all Members, regardless of their experience or fitness level. The good news is that no special clothing or equipment is required. However, you will need access to a device that allows you to join Google Meet.

### BALANCE AND STABILITY

**Location:** Virtual

**Date:** 02 June – 11 August (10-week course). Please note: there will be no session on 30 June.

**Application deadline:** 14 May

These weekly classes will focus on building physical stability via progressive strength training exercises that are simple to perform.

**Who can apply?**

Suitable for all Members regardless of experience or fitness level. No special clothing or equipment is required, but you will need access to a device that allows you to join Google Meet.





## COUPLES' GLAMPING WEEKEND

**Location:** Somerset

**Date:** 26-29 September

**Application deadline:** 01 July

Escape to the great outdoors for a relaxing couples' glamping weekend. You'll be able to experience the perfect blend of comfort and nature while connecting with Blesma couples as you stay in stylish, fully equipped lodges.

**Who can apply?**

Any Member and their partner or spouse.

## HORSE RIDING UK

**Location:** New Forest

**Date:** 08-11 September

**Application deadline:** 01 May

Spend three days discovering all things cowboy and horsemanship as you ride through the horse county of the UK.

**Who can apply?**

You must be fit enough to ride a horse every day and have been on an intro to horse riding event or have a history with horses. The maximum weight limit for this activity is 14 stone.

## RIDE TO THE WALL

**Location:** Burton upon Trent

**Date:** 03-04 October

**Application deadline:** 01 June

Join Blesma on this annual poignant and meaningful ride in memory of the fallen, culminating in a moment of reflection at the National Memorial Arboretum.



**Who can apply?**

Any Member with their own motorcycle.

## FITNESS AND LIFESTYLE COURSE

**Location:** Spain

**Date:** 14-22 November

**Application deadline:** 01 July

Take a break and refresh your mind and body. Get moving, explore Spain and try out new activities. Improve your diet, discover tips for balancing your lifestyle and enjoy a variety of activities including yoga, pilates, paddleboarding and golf.

**Who can apply?**

Any Member. This is not a couple's activity.

**Requirements:** You must have at least three months' validity left on your passport from the day you return home.

## GREEK REGATTA

**Location:** Greece

**Date:** 13-21 September

**Application deadline:** 15 May

This is a chance to learn to sail in the Mediterranean. Beginners will be able to gain the first level of a yachting qualification, whilst those with more experience can simply enjoy lots of great sailing.

**Who can apply?**

The boat is not wheelchair accessible, and Members must be able to move around a 40ft non-adapted boat with minimal assistance. Members must state if they cannot swim on their application.

**Requirements:** Anyone can apply, but you must be physically fit and a confident swimmer in open water.



## A special time to remember others

### REMEMBRANCE WEEKEND

**Location:** London

**Date:** 08-09 November

**Application deadline:** 15 June

The annual Blesma Remembrance Parade at The Cenotaph during Remembrance Weekend is one of the most poignant events in the Blesma calendar. Blesma makes a weekend of the occasion, with a social gathering the evening before and a hearty lunch before departure.

**Who can apply?**

Any Member and their spouse/partner/carer. Members are not expected to share rooms with other Members.





## PHOTOGRAPHY SOUTH

**Location:** New Forest

**Date:** 08-11 September

**Application deadline:** 01 May

Members will have the chance to put their photography skills to the test in a relaxed setting. They'll explore new techniques, expand their creative

vision, and capture a variety of subjects as they visit locations throughout the New Forest. A great opportunity to learn, experiment and enhance your photography.

### Who can apply?

Any Member who owns their own camera, smartphone or tablet.

## WOULD YOU LIKE TO PUT ON AN ACTIVITY?

If so, we'd love to hear from you! The Activities Team are available to give you as much support as you need 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](mailto: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 in a safe environment. Is the activity suitable for those with limited mobility? Is the venue accessible and wheelchair friendly? Blesma will pay for the cost of hiring the venue, the activity itself, refreshments and, where appropriate, accommodation. Please get in touch with the Activities Team if you would like to learn more.







**“THE COURSE HELPED  
ME MASSIVELY. I FELT  
FREE TO SHOW AND  
SHARE MY EMOTIONS”**

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YOU DON'T ALWAYS HAVE TO SPEAK TO TELL YOUR STORY. THE LATEST WELL-RECEIVED ADDITION TO THE BLESMA STORYTELLING AND WELLBEING PROGRAMME SAW MEMBERS CREATE SCULPTURES WITH MEANING

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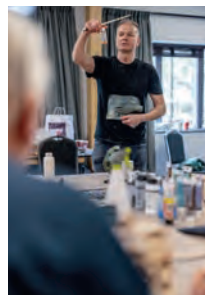


It's not every day you get to make a plaster cast of your face and turn it into a poignant piece of art, but embracing challenge is a fundamental part of Blesma. So that's exactly what happened when a group of Members took part in a unique experience at an innovative sculpture workshop that was designed to release creative talents and generate self-awareness and confidence. Ending up exhausted, energised and splattered with plaster, the eight Members who took part in the Blesma Storytelling and Wellbeing Programme's Sculpture Workshop in Newcastle at the start of February produced a stunning set of deeply personal sculptures from casts of their faces, shoulders and hands that were then inset with mementos and possessions that they were invited to bring along with them to give their work added relevance.

"I didn't really know what to expect, but the whole process was very liberating," says Mick McConnell, a former Royal Air Force policeman and dog handler who was injured whilst on patrol in Afghanistan in 2011 and had a below-knee amputation of his left leg two years later. "I was a bit nervous about attending to be honest, but the whole thing turned out to be a very welcoming and comfortable environment."

"I really enjoyed the whole experience, and the fact that I could do it with other Blesma Members who have similar experiences or approaches to life was important. We were able to talk openly to each other and express how we were feeling because it was so relaxed and welcoming."

**The two-day sculpture course gave the Members who took part the chance to craft a piece of art with a personal meaning**



The two-day course, which followed an introductory online session with acclaimed sculptor and course leader Simon Watson, kicked off with a discussion about art to encourage the group's freedom of expression. Participants then immersed themselves in constructing and personalising their plaster artwork. Some Members chose to cast their full face (with help from other Members!) while others decided on a partial face mould or other body part.

### LOSING YOURSELF IN MODELLING

Guided by Vanessa Liladhar and Frankie Mapes from The Drive Project, which devised and ran the course as part of its expansion to the increasingly popular Blesma Storytelling and Wellbeing Programme, the Members were able to take time to explore and express their feelings through art while being absorbed in the technical tasks of mould-making.

The process involved building up a mould with strips of plaster, which was then allowed to dry overnight. Members came back the next day to insert their keepsakes into pieces of clay that were set into the mould before plaster was finally poured in and left to set to create a finished 3-D piece that could then be painted.

"It was handled really well, and we just lost ourselves in the modelling," adds Mick, from Elgin, Scotland, who chose a police whistle, a trinket from his daughter, a tiny silver box containing a sixpence piece and a cherub given to him by his mother and sister as a good luck charm for his tour of duty in



Richard Cave with  
his part-finished  
hand sculpture

**“BLESMA INSPIRES  
ME TO TRY THINGS  
I WOULDN'T NORMALLY  
DO. THAT MAKES A  
HUGE DIFFERENCE”**  
HARRY EDIE





### LIZ COOPER

*Liz became a Widow Member after her husband Shaun, who served in the Army Air Corps, passed away last year*

#### What sculpture did you make?

My husband died suddenly last year, and I wanted to make a sculpture of my hands because of my wedding ring. Doing a face would have been too claustrophobic for me. They poured plaster around my hands, and I had to wiggle them out once it had set. I then painted it with layers of black and gold so it looks bronze. I'm delighted with it, and it is on my mantelpiece now.

#### Did anything about the workshop surprise you?

I didn't know what to expect, but once we got going it all made sense. I was the only woman there, but I was made to feel very welcome.

#### Did you enjoy the course and the process?

I could have stayed another day it was so good. Everyone was so helpful and supportive, and Frankie and Vanessa went above and beyond. It was very personal for each of us and was about much more than a piece of artwork. I suffer from anxiety, and I got quite upset because I was struggling to finish it, but these lovely people were there to support me.

#### How important are Blesma activities to you?

I didn't know what to do after my husband died, but Blesma was there for me and has done a lot for me. It has given me a life, and being able to attend something like this and be with other Members means so much to me.

Mick McConnell  
and Martyn O'Brien  
(below)





Afghanistan, and a Queen chess piece to represent his wife Lorna to inlay into his full-face mould.

"I was thinking of doing something about mental health in black and white, but that plays to the internal monologue that can bring you down. I didn't want it to be a negative piece, so I thought I would do something that would make me smile and have something that is close to my heart, which is why I brought along these objects," adds Mick. "The result was a full-face mask with indents of the pieces I brought, which make it really special and personal."

Mick got much more from the sessions than he was initially expecting. "The course helped me massively. It was two days of relaxing, being mindful and being among people with similar attitudes and experiences, hearing their stories and having a laugh and a lot of banter. I felt free to show and share my emotions, and Frankie and Vanessa were always there to help and support us. It really surprised me how open we were with each other.

"I was a bit concerned about going on the course, but I loved it and we are now keeping in touch online and have developed a little community. I've already found it motivates me to do more stuff rather than just sitting watching the TV."

### EXPANDING THE IDEA OF STORYTELLING

The Sculpture with Storytelling Workshop was part of the Storytelling and Wellbeing Programme run by The Drive Project for Blesma, and a further two-day session is already planned for Bristol in April.



**The Members enhanced their creative skills, made something they were proud of and boosted their confidence and sense of self**







“We wanted to expand what we mean by ‘storytelling’ and explore different ways in which people can tell a story,” says project lead Vanessa. “Telling a story through a piece of art opens up the opportunity for Members who might not have wanted to share anything verbally.”

“It’s true that there was a fair amount of trepidation at first, and you could feel the nerves in the room to start with, but everyone soon relaxed and supported each other, particularly when making the face masks as you needed someone to help create the mould.”

“Everyone was quite tired by the end of the second day, but the positive feedback we got was immediate because Members had a finished piece of artwork, whereas on other storytelling programmes it can take a while to feel the impact. Members benefitted from the experience by learning or enhancing their creative skills, making something that they were proud of and boosting their sense of confidence and sense of self. It has also brought them together with other Members whom they might not have met.”

Operations Director Tony Bloomfield agrees.

“It’s wonderful to hear from Members about the positive time they are having through our Storytelling and Wellbeing Programme. The positive difference the experience is making to their lives is a true reflection of the programme’s strength.”

*If you are interested in taking part in one of the Storytelling and Wellbeing workshops, please turn to p22 for more information on what’s coming up*

## HOW SONG WRITING CAN HELP WITH STORYTELLING AND WELLBEING

*While some Members were expressing themselves through sculpture, others channeled their creative energy into writing and recording a song*

Elsewhere, another initiative from the Storytelling and Wellbeing Programme saw Members take part in a one-day workshop led by experienced musician David Tims, the pianist for *The Amy Winehouse Band*. They explored the art and structures of song writing before recording a track.



“The Members worked together to write the lyrics and create the song, then perform it – all in just one day,” said Frankie Mapes, Project Manager with The Drive Project, which organised the course in Southampton in January. “They learned the process of chord structures and lyrics before recording solos and a chorus. Everyone really enjoyed learning about the whole process and had a lot of fun, and the creation of the song highlighted the power of music as a tool for self-expression and as a means to support ourselves and others emotionally.”

“During the day, the group shared how they had been through some harder times recently and wanted to create a song that would uplift others, and they were proud of what they achieved.”





## HARRY EDIE

*Harry served in the Royal Artillery before an ankle injury and a muscle-wasting condition cut short his Army career. He has been a Blesma Member for 18 months*

### What did you enjoy about the sculpture workshop?

It was really good to interact with the other Members and discuss our experiences. It was just a friendly environment with lovely people, and it was great to learn new skills.

### Did you have preconceptions about what it would involve?

I had no idea what it would be like, but my view is always to keep an open mind and experience something new.

### How did you find the process?

Getting your face covered in Vaseline and plaster before sitting around in a mask is really weird, and it did take us out of our comfort zone, but the fact that other people were doing it and we were all in it together helped us to relax. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

### Has the workshop changed your approach to life?

Blesma activities offer you the chance to try things you would never otherwise get to do. Whether you are travelling down a zip wire or making a sculpture, they give you extra confidence in yourself. I'm limited with what I can do with my arms and muscles, but Blesma inspires me to try things I wouldn't normally do – that makes a huge difference to me.

### Would you recommend the workshop?

Absolutely. It was great fun and something very different, and to experience that with other Members was rewarding. Everyone was so welcoming and helpful, and we got to leave with a piece of artwork which was special to each of us.



Troy Connor and  
Chris Smith (above)



GET THE LOWDOWN ON...

# The Blesma Widows' Rep

A QUARTER OF THE ASSOCIATION'S MEMBERS ARE WIDOWS OR WIDOWERS. TO MAKE SURE THEIR BLESMA EXPERIENCE IS AS GOOD AS IT CAN BE, THEY NOW HAVE A DEDICATED REP

**B**lesma Member Lorraine Anderson (pictured right) has taken up her new role as the Association's inaugural Widows' Representative and will represent the interests of the Association's Widows and Widowers, liaising with the Board of Trustees to ensure their voices are heard.

"Blesma Widows now account for about a quarter of our membership, and the Board of Trustees wanted to hear from them, which is why Lorraine's role was created," says Blesma Chief Executive Vivienne Buck. "We will liaise with Lorraine throughout the year, and she will attend the Board meeting at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in June. Lorraine will be the voice of the Association's Widows and Widowers, collating their combined thoughts as well as any issues they have, and bringing them to the attention of the Board."

Lorraine is a former hospital ward sister who now lives in the north of Scotland. She was voted into the role at last year's Annual General Meeting.

She joined the Association shortly after losing her husband George – a former Royal Air Force officer – in 2019, and credits Blesma with giving her purpose and friendships during Covid. During that time, she attended a digital communications workshop and several online courses that she says "gave me



a reason to get up in the morning and introduced me to a brand new community who I wouldn't have otherwise met."

As a result, she now runs a popular Zoom quiz and is a regular at Blesma events, where her positive personality helps bring people together.

"The Association regularly runs events for its Widows, who range in age from their early sixties to their nineties," says Vivienne. "They are a unique group and are not likely to need the medical support aids that Blesma facilitates, but they look to Blesma for social integration and, in many cases, to combat loneliness. We are

here for them and want to do our best for them. This role is a good conduit so they can be heard, and the Board is looking forward to working with Lorraine."

## How did the role of Widows' Representative come about?

**Lorraine:** The Board wanted to connect with Blesma's Widows to understand their issues and challenges, and thought it would be best served by having a Widow who could speak to the Board directly. I volunteered and was elected at the AGM. The role is in its infancy, but it is about engaging with Widows and passing on their views to the board. Many Widows are keen to give something back and would be willing to volunteer for Blesma.

## What do you hope to achieve?

I want Widows to get the best experience from Blesma and to feel as though they can contribute to helping other Members. I see it as developing the family aspect of the Association. When my husband died, I got a lot from being part of the Association, and I want that feeling to radiate around Blesma's Widows.

## What challenges do you face?

It's a new role, so both I and the Board of Trustees will have to work out the best way of handling things as we go along. The good thing is that the role has been established with the best intentions. One





Lorraine (far left) pictured with friends and fellow Widows at last year's Members' Weekend



issue I have noticed is that Widows tend to be a bit reluctant to see themselves as Members in their own right. We don't vote, but we can contribute to the greater good. We also need to spread the word about the activities on offer and encourage more Widows to take part. I got so much from joining in – whether that was with crafting or quizzes – after my husband died, and I've made some great friends.

#### **What are the benefits for Widows?**

Making friendships, sharing experiences and helping each other. The community is getting stronger all the time, and that can

only have positive outcomes for Members' health and wellbeing. It fits very strongly with the Blesma ethos of Member helping Member; this is Widow helping Widow. My direct route to the Board will help them understand how and where they can help to make that happen even more.

#### **What can't you do in the role?**

It is a volunteer position, and I don't have the skills, knowledge or experience of the fantastic Support and Outreach Officers, so I'm not the person to call for that kind of help. My role is focused on representing Widows on more general aspects.

#### **How will it work day to day?**

I will be liaising with Board Member Richard Gilbert on a regular basis and can relay anything I pick up from Widows at events, meetings or from things they raise in general conversation. I don't anticipate making a string of demands, but it will be good to have a dialogue that can lead to a swift resolution, whether that is something minor or something that might need a little more attention.

*If you would like to get in touch with Lorraine, you can contact her by email at [blesmawid@gmail.com](mailto:blesmawid@gmail.com)*



# DO YOU WANT TO BUILD A SNOWMAN?

FORGET KIDS' MOVIES, THE 230-MILE SNOWMAN TREK HAS ALL THE MAKINGS OF AN ACTION-PACKED HOLLYWOOD BLOCKBUSTER







**T**he air is crystal clear and the scenery, rising from the lush valleys to the majestic snow-capped Himalayan peaks, is breathtaking. But as well as being beautiful, this vista is also the backdrop to one of the world's truly great challenges; a demanding and often treacherous 28-day trek that pushes brave adventurers to their physical limits and frays their mental core.

The 230-mile Snowman Trek in Bhutan winds through dry stream beds and scree-covered trails as well as narrow passes that cling to the sides of mountains inches from peril. It is a challenge wrapped in natural beauty but peppered with jeopardy. The trek can only be attempted in a narrow weather window every autumn, and ferocious conditions last year resulted in several teams having to be airlifted to safety.

Each year, more people summit Mount Everest than complete the spectacular but punishing adventure through Bhutan; fewer than 10 people saw success on the Snowman Trek last year compared to Everest's success rate of 800.

### **DIGGING DEEP IN BHUTAN**

The daunting prospect of an on-the-edge mission proved to be irresistible for below-knee amputees Rich Potter and Rich 'Dickie' Davies. The former military men had to delve into the depths of their physical and mental resilience, enduring stomach-emptying sickness and battling near-constant pain during their quest to generate funds for Blesma and the Royal British Legion, and raise awareness of the potential of those living with disability.

The corrosive pressures of walking across inhospitable terrain eventually





**“I could either lie in my pit or put my leg on, get kitted up and continue to put one foot in front of the other” says Rich Potter of the tough times during the trek**

forced former RAF corporal Dickie to pull out after 11 days when his stump swelled up so much that it could no longer fit into its socket, but not before he set a world record with his trek partner for becoming the first amputees to complete the Half Snowman Trek.

“I was distraught that I couldn’t finish the trek but it would have been too dangerous to continue,” says 37-year-old Dickie, who suffered a foot injury while serving in Cyprus in 2019 that caused excruciating Complex Regional Pain Syndrome and led to his left leg being amputated below the knee. “Getting to be the first amputee to make the Half Snowman Trek with Rich was something special though.”

Rich, a former Royal Logistic Corps captain, was forced to take on the second half of the trek on his own. “I watched Dickie limp into camp on Day 11 and knew that he was physically broken. The swelling in his stump had become so severe that he just couldn’t carry on. When he left, it was devastating. It was like someone had removed my other leg! All our training, preparation and planning had been done as a pair.

“Dickie was the best teammate I could have had, his sense of humour and resilience made the first 11 days of the expedition some of the best of my life, and I was crushed when he had to leave.”

Rich, who had his left leg amputated below the knee after sepsis set in following an ankle injury sustained in an Army football match in 2015, continued alone and became the first amputee to finish the full course, adding to the duo’s world record of becoming the first amputees to complete the Half Snowman Trek.

The intrepid pair had spent a year planning and training for the expedition after returning from the 2023 Invictus Games as gold medallists. But despite all the meticulous organising, they had to ditch kilos of gear – including a spare prosthetic leg each – before they could take their first steps on the expedition, which was supported by a team of guides, a cook and 12 horses to carry the group’s tents, food and water to the only resupply point 11 days in.

### TAKING PART WAS A PRIVILEGE

Fuelled by calorie-laden breakfasts of eggs, porridge and pancakes, lunches packed full of carbs and vegetables, and substantial evening meals of noodle dishes, momo [*steamed filled dumplings*] and curries, the small group crossed varying terrains and wild camped in sub-zero temperatures.

“Taking part was a privilege and we count ourselves very lucky to have experienced it,” says Dickie. “The trekking was intense and, as an amputee, you had to keep looking down because the ground was so rocky and uneven, and stray stones caused jarring through our stumps. But when we were able to look up – and when we were resting – we were surrounded by clear blue skies and absolute silence, and we could take in what a magical place Bhutan is. The mountains just rose up either side of us, and it was incredible to be somewhere so remote and disconnected.

“I was an emotional mess when I had to pull out. Mentally, I was not ready to give in, but physically I knew my leg would not allow me to continue –



## THE SNOWMAN TREK: MAKE IT A MONTH TO REMEMBER

*Has all this got you thinking about taking on the Snowman Trek? Here's more of an idea of what you'd be letting yourself in for...*

- Only **seven of the 68** entrants completed the **Snowman Trek in 2024**
- The route from **Paro to Bumthang** takes **28 days to complete**
- There are **15km** of ascent during the trek
- **11 mountain passes** must be negotiated. **Ten** of those passes are above **4,500m** and **five** are above **5,000m**
- During the trek, night-time temperatures can drop as low as **-27°C**
- Rich consumed **88 painkillers**, used **34 blister dressings**, **56 alcohol wipes** and **14 days of broad-spectrum antibiotics** over the **28 days**
- The pair saw **Himalayan black bears**, **takins**, a **red panda**, **blue sheep** and **yak**











**“Sometimes in life, we need to turn around and take a look at how far we’ve come,” says Rich Potter on completing The Snowman Trek**

it would have been too dangerous. Nothing is certain when you are an amputee, but I gave it my best shot and I’m thrilled with what I achieved – and with what Rich ended up doing. We built up a strong relationship through the Invictus Games and it was fantastic to attempt this challenge with him.”

Rich, from Norwich, agrees: “The physical aspect was obviously very demanding, but we were trained to cope with that. The mental side was another matter, as you would be alone with your thoughts for a lot of the time and you wondered why you were doing it.

“That constant questioning was a war of attrition, but we kept motivated by wanting to make our families proud and being determined to show what disabled people can do. There were some tough times, such as walking along cliff edges when the visibility was low with horses in front and behind you. At one point, I fell and broke my hiking pole in three places but thankfully managed not to go over the edge!

“Then, on Day 20, I felt horrific. We were camping at 5,500 metres, I’d had less than an hour’s sleep and my stomach would not allow me to keep even the most basic of foods down. The harsh reality was that a chopper was at least 24 hours away so I could either lie in my pit or put my leg on, get kitted up and continue to put one foot in front of the other. A couple of miles into the day, I turned and looked back at the vast, towering, ice-capped peaks behind me, and I had a little smile to myself. I had gone more than 225km, and sometimes in life we need to turn around and take a look at how far we’ve come. It might not be where

we hoped to be, but it’s sometimes a hell of a lot further than where we were days, weeks, months or years ago.

“Walking at very high altitude every day for a month takes a toll on the body. I had blisters on my stump that took weeks to heal, and had recurring gastrointestinal issues that I could not shake. I’m lucky to have had multiple deployments with the Army, and they helped prepare me for how hard it would be to be away from my wife, Ellie and son, Theo.”

### **SHOWING WHAT DISABLED PEOPLE CAN DO**

Now the pair are back home Dickie, who has two young children, has turned his focus to archery, having been selected for the Paralympics Pathway programme with the aim of qualifying for either the Los Angeles Games in 2028 or Brisbane in 2032.

Rich, meanwhile, is devoting time to his family. “On a personal note, it is awesome to be the first – and only – amputee to complete the Snowman Trek, but that record is only a piece of paper. Our bigger goal was to empower others and help create change. For many people, their challenge will be much less arduous, but it is so important for people to feel that they can push themselves and go a bit further.

“We wanted to show what disabled people can do. We want to encourage people to face their challenges and to help society realise that disabled people can do both amazing things and normal things,” says Rich. “We could not have done this without Blesma’s support. The reward will be in the people who are empowered by our experience.”



A photograph of a busy train station. In the foreground, the rear wheel and part of the frame of a motorcycle are visible on the right. The background is filled with blurred figures of people walking through the station, suggesting a fast-paced environment. Overhead, there are large digital display boards showing train schedules and platform numbers like 12 and 13. The lighting is bright, typical of a large indoor public space.

# MASTERING THE MORNING COMMUTE

BUSY BUS LANES, CAVALIER CYCLISTS  
AND STATION PLATFORMS PACKED  
WITH IMPATIENT PEDESTRIANS AREN'T  
GOING TO HOLD JONATHAN BELL UP  
– HE'S GOING PLACES IN A HURRY!





**Blesma Member Jonathan Bell on his commute through London using a wheelchair he applied to the Veterans' Mobility Fund for**





**"I decided to go to uni and that was the making of me. I got a chance at a second career and was determined to make the most of it"**

**J**onathan Bell is deep into a compelling War and Psychiatry Master's degree that will help him use his life experiences to support veterans and make sure their voices are heard. The course, which delves into complex strands of behaviour, policy and history is demanding and intense, but Jonathan has made it easier by completing one important assignment – a successful application to the Veterans' Mobility Fund for a lightweight wheelchair with an assisted power pack.

The former 1st Battalion Green Howard is now able to commute much more easily from his home in Surrey to central London, whizzing along cycle lanes to lectures, seminars and library sessions at King's College Institute of Psychiatry.

"This new model is fantastic and has replaced my battered old wheelchair," he says. "I can zip around town and don't need to use buses or taxis as I just use the cycle lanes from Waterloo to the campus. It means I can get to lectures on time, and it makes life and studying so much easier than it could otherwise have been."

Jonathan was injured on a military training exercise as he prepared for operations in Bosnia in 1993 that resulted in him being paralysed from the chest down. He has become one of the first recipients of an award via the £2.52m Veterans' Mobility Fund (VMF), which was established in March last year after a successful joint lobbying campaign by Blesma and Help for Heroes.

### REMOVING THE STRESS

Jonathan's application ran smoothly; from identifying the model of wheelchair he needed and arranging medical support and service documentation, to completing a set of forms which then went before the VMF panel. The panel assesses grants for mobility aids that are not usually available on the NHS, such as specialist wheelchairs and mobility scooters, as well as different orthotics such as splints and braces.

"I found the entire process simple, straightforward and easy to follow," adds Jonathan, 60, a keen hand cyclist who organises an annual cycle event to raise funds for the Association. "When I saw that the applications were open, I went

to Draft Wheelchairs in Cambridge to try a wheelchair with an electric attachment as my old chair had been bumped so much that it was definitely on its way out.

"With my studies in central London, I needed a wheelchair that was lightweight and easy to handle getting on and off trains, and which could get me places quickly without draining my strength and energy. The wheelchair gets a lot of use in daily life, but it really comes into its own on the commute. I can use the train no problem, then I just clip the electric attachment onto the front and whizz over to the campus, which is about three miles from Waterloo Station. It is quick and safe, and takes the stress out of the journey."

And what does Jonathan think about the VMF application process? "It involved supplying proof of eligibility covering my service and disability. I then got the quote for the new equipment, which was supported by a clinician; in my case a physiotherapist wrote a supporting letter about how it would help reduce the stress on my body and extend my active life.

"It all ran very efficiently and once approved, the funds were released to





**"I would certainly recommend applying to the VMF if you have a need for new equipment, whatever your reason," says Jonathan**

the manufacturers who then let me know when the new chair was ready. In total, it took about five months. I'm sure every claim is different, but it wasn't a difficult process to navigate. You have to decide what you need and then just follow the VMF guidelines. The criteria are very clear, so just follow the process and you will be fine. It is certainly worth doing and has made my life and pursuing the Master's much easier."

### BEING LEFT SERIOUSLY INJURED

Jonathan joined the Army in 1986 and completed several tours of Northern Ireland before the accident, which left him and 15 other soldiers seriously injured. Jonathan was paralysed from the upper chest down and was in hospital for seven



months. After a medical discharge at the age of just 26, he decided to pursue education. He gained a number of A-levels and a degree before he embarked on a successful career as a journalist.

"I hadn't done so well at school, so picking up education again when I was around the age of 30 was a challenge,

but I did an access course in English and Sociology and loved it," he says. "I decided to go to university and that was the making of me. I got a chance at a second career and was determined to make the most of it."

Jonathan's continuing desire to learn, and a willingness to share insights for the good of the military veterans' community, drove him to enrol on the Master's course, which involves regular 6,000-word essays and a final 15,000-word dissertation. The course aims to promote understanding of how 'individuals, both members of the Armed Forces and civilians, prepare for and cope with psychological trauma. It is designed to develop the knowledge and skills required to explore the field of human conflict and its impact on health and wellbeing.'

Aligning with Blesma's ethos of furthering knowledge about the impact of service and conflict, it lists a key benefit as gaining an 'understanding of how people prepare themselves for war, cope during conflict, respond to trauma and adjust to peacetime life.'

"My dad was in the Army, I joined up and then defence became a niche area in

**"THERE HAS BEEN A SHIFT TO RECOGNISING THAT PEOPLE WITH EXPERIENCES SHOULD BE ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE, AND THAT IS WHERE I WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE"**





Jonathan (above right) spends time talking with one of his course tutors, and commuting through Waterloo Station (below)







my journalism career. I have a deep knowledge of soldiers, veterans and associated issues, so when I came across this course it was perfect. It is about soldiers and mental health, but that is only the tip of the iceberg. My last essay was about atrocities in war and what makes soldiers commit them, so it is a broad and challenging course.

"I'm learning new things all the time and, ultimately, I'm interested in becoming involved in military and veterans' policy, contributing from a soldier's or veteran's point of view. The veteran's voice is vital in getting the right policies and support in place, and I'd like to be a part of improving resources and conditions for them.

"Myself and others have a lifetime of experience, whether it is navigating NHS pathways or more general advice, and that experience and insight should be used. There has been a shift towards recognising that people with experiences should be able to contribute, and that is really where I want to make a difference.

"The Master's is a fascinating subject and is part of my journey, and studying is made easier and more enjoyable because of my new wheelchair. I would recommend applying to the VMF if you have a need for new equipment, whatever your reason."

## "THE VETERAN'S VOICE IS VITAL IN GETTING THE RIGHT POLICIES AND SUPPORT IN PLACE"



## YOUR GUIDE TO THE VMF

*The Veterans' Mobility Fund provides mobility aids such as specialist wheelchairs and mobility scooters, orthotics such as splints and braces, and other equipment to help veterans lead independent and fulfilling lives. Here's what you need to know*

### Who can apply?

Any veteran in receipt of a War Pension or an award from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme can apply for equipment for a service-attributable condition that affects their mobility.

### What type of equipment can I apply for?

The application must be for something that is not usually provided by the NHS. This can be for orthotics or equipment that will help with daily, family or work life. Applications for vehicle adaptations are also considered.

### What is not included?

Car leases, home adaptations, medical or surgical procedures, ongoing clinical treatment, hot tubs/saunas/hydro pools, or structural house adaptations. Equipment that has already been purchased is not covered.

### How long will I have to wait?

The application will be acknowledged within 10 working days from the time it is received and a decision will usually be made within 30 days. The time it takes

to receive the equipment will depend on whether it is in stock with suppliers or if it needs to be manufactured to order.

### What details do I need to provide?

Each application must be accompanied by supporting documentation from a GP and/or an occupational therapist or physiotherapist.

### Who makes the decision?

A panel of experts with experience of working with veterans. The panel meets monthly and includes a Blesma Member to give an opinion based on lived experience. The panel will provide reasons for any refusal along with advice on how best to proceed with gaining support and funding from other sources.

### How many times can I apply?

The panel reviews each case on an individual basis, so you can apply as many times as you want. If you have complex health needs then it is possible to make applications for each. Similarly, if the clinical need changes then a new application can be made.

## HOW AND WHERE DO I APPLY?

You can begin the application process by entering your details via the following link: <https://r1.dotdigital-pages.com/p/1DW2-1CB3/vmfapplication1> If you are unable to access the online form, please contact the Veterans' Mobility Fund on 0300 303 9888



# THE FRONTLINE WALK

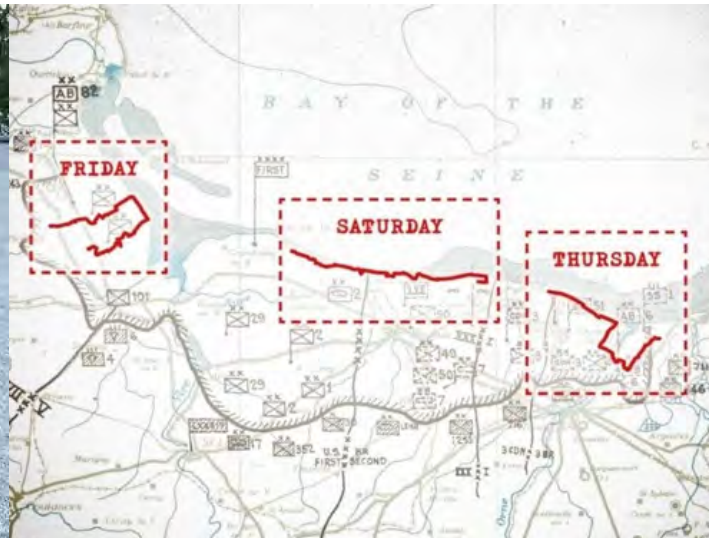


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**Army  
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Fund**

**Registration Fee: £150**  
**Fundraising Target: £1,350**



# Bulletin

## Operation Christmas Cheer is a big success

*Blesma's Christmas hamper initiative is becoming a mainstay, and is spreading festive cheer to more people than ever*

**N**ow entering its fourth year, Blesma's Operation Christmas Cheer hamper appeal continues to grow, spreading Christmas cheer to the Association's most socially isolated and older veterans and Widows.

"When we launched the initiative in 2022, we delivered 116 hampers with the help of our corporate supporters," said Alana Warwick, Senior Corporate Fundraising Officer. "In 2024, which marked the initiative's third consecutive year, we expanded our outreach, delivering 296 hampers across Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which surpassed our target of 270."

The project has received vital support and funding from various trusts and organisations, as well as the Association's corporate supporters. Nine businesses collaborated with Blesma in 2024 donating, assembling and distributing 160 hampers, which amounted to around £9,000 worth of donations. The remaining 136 hampers were packed and dispatched by a team of corporate volunteers from Mitie Group PLC who are one of Blesma's corporate partners (see p13).



**Almost 300 Members and Widows were gifted a Blesma Christmas hamper in 2024**

"We are aware that loneliness can wreak havoc on an individual's physical, mental and cognitive health," said Alana, "and the feedback from Members has given us confidence that this project has had the intended effect."

"One Member wrote to us saying: 'Thank you Blesma for my food hamper. What a great surprise – it was the only present I got to open.' Another messaged: 'Thank you for the unexpected hamper. It was a great surprise on a day when I was

feeling down. It really cheered me up.'

"The impact has been immeasurable," said Alana, "and we are thrilled to have received a very generous donation of £100,000 from The Anderton Foundation which will help fund Operation Christmas Cheer, and a range of festive activities for Members for the next three years."

"This wonderful gift will help us ensure that Members feel less alone during the festive period, and we are grateful to the Foundation for its support."

**"This wonderful gift will help us ensure that Members feel less alone during the festive period"**



# Wales and West: Festive cheer and big plans for the new year

**T**he lead-up to Christmas was a whirlwind of activity, with countless miles covered to visit Members at home, last-minute drop-ins to Limb Centres, and some wonderfully festive Christmas lunches with our Social Groups. December was a time for connection and companionship as our Gloucester, Cardiff and Swansea Social Groups came together to share good food, laughter and stories. It was heartwarming to see Members enjoying time away from home, making friends and strengthening bonds within the Blesma family.

We were delighted to welcome our Chief Executive, Viv, to the Gloucester Christmas lunch at Hatherley Manor. This well-attended gathering brought together Members of all ages, their partners and carers. Viv spent valuable time listening to their experiences, reaffirming why Blesma remains such a vital charity in these challenging times. Our Director Independence and Wellbeing, Ian, also made the journey to join the Swansea Social Group for their Christmas lunch, where the atmosphere was lively and full of festive cheer. Members truly appreciated his visit, and left feeling seen, heard and valued.

For many, Christmas is a time of joy, but for some it can be overwhelming or even isolating. The Christmas hampers, kindly coordinated and sent out by Blesma, were a much-needed surprise for those facing difficulties. These small gestures mean the world to those struggling, showing them that they are never alone.

Unfortunately, the festive period also brought the loss of some much-loved Members. Their passing is deeply felt, and our work supporting Widows and families through grief, paperwork and financial adjustments has never been more crucial. The weight of bereavement is heavy, but Blesma stands beside its Members, ensuring they are never left to navigate these challenges without experienced and warm support. Being able to contact us for help to navigate



**Robert 'Steve' Hurlock and Clive Smith catch up at the Shrewsbury Social Group lunch**

War Widows' Pension applications, access to benefits, finding the right solicitor or help with financial difficulties, completing the infinite amount of paperwork after losing a loved one and knowing who to contact for the right advice and counselling is crucially important. Your BSOs do this work across the UK on a regular basis, and we are here to help when you need us.

## HELPING WITH HOSPITALS AND HOME ADAPTATIONS

The past few months have seen a significant rise in support needs across Wales and the West. Home visits, hospital check-ins, and trips to Limb Centres and care homes have kept us, and our Blesma volunteers, busier than ever. With many Members admitted to hospital with vascular complications, falls, infections and surgeries, the need for equipment and home adaptations has grown. The effects of the Covid lockdowns continue to present challenges, with services stretched and automated systems often failing to meet the needs of our Members. One of the biggest hurdles we face is

ensuring that Members can return home safely after a hospital stay. In some areas, they are discharged with little or no support, while in others, delays in local services mean they cannot leave hospital at all. Funding cuts and administrative roadblocks make it difficult for Members to access the help they need, whether that's disability grants, social care or home adaptations. This is where Blesma steps in – advocating, challenging and/or collaborating with local services to ensure that Members are not forgotten. Whether it's securing garden grants, arranging home maintenance, accessing chiropody, or finding suitable mobility equipment, we are here to make life easier for those who have given so much.

## A FUN AND FLAVOURSOME START TO THE NEW YEAR

Outreach Officer Jason kicked off 2025 with an exciting range of activities and social lunches to bring Members together and create new memories. Thanks to Lottery Funding in Wales, and our dedicated Blesma budget for the West





Gloucester Social Group celebrated the festive season in style at their Christmas lunch in December



Kevin Murphy and partner Christina



Members enjoying lunch in Llandudno

of England, we have a fantastic schedule of events lined up. From feasts in Wrexham, Bangor, Llandudno, Shrewsbury, The Wirral and Cheltenham to unique experiences such as chocolate tasting, iFly Manchester and a visit to the Titanic Exhibition in Newport, there will be something for everyone in 2025.

These events are more than just outings; they provide vital opportunities for Members to step out of their homes, build friendships and share experiences. The power of community cannot be overstated, and Jason's efforts in organising these

activities ensure that no Member feels isolated. With St David's Day on the horizon, we are looking forward to celebrating with our Cardiff & Vale and Swansea Members – so look out for Jason's Forecast of Events for more info.

The only cost to Members (as well as partners/carers) is the travel to and from the activity. In some cases, we will even pick up our Members and drop them back at home. If Jason and I are unavailable, one of our volunteers will step in or we will arrange disability taxi transport to make sure you can enjoy time with others.

A belated Happy New Year and a very warm welcome to 2025 from your Wales and West Team.

**Tom Hall, Support Officer**

**Members can contact Tom or Jason using the details on p68. Professional partners, clinicians, or any other non-Member can contact Tom or refer veterans in Wales and West to Blesma using the Association's website [www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org) or the Blesma Wales and West Referral Form, which can be supplied on request.**



# Northern Ireland: Roadshows, home visits and escape rooms

**T**his year kickstarted with a 'Brunch & Blether' event held in each county that allowed Members to reconnect and take the time to explore and share ideas for future outreach activities. Meanwhile, an online event saw Members put their heads together and work as a team to try to get out of an Escape Room.

Upcoming events include a Bake Off competition to determine the best Blesma baker and a creative art workshop, as well as collaborations with The Drive Project for the Blesma Storytelling and Wellbeing Programme, and Disability Sports NI, who will host a Try Out Sports Day.

During the winter months, the Blesma 'at home' crafters kept busy knitting and crocheting warm hats and scarves to donate to those who face homelessness. These



**'At home' craft sessions have kept everyone busy over the long winter months**



**Fiona Morrison (right) drops in for a home visit and a cuppa**

items were delivered to Andy Allen Veterans Support as part of the Homeless Warrior project. Member Mark Rogerson gives up his time to support this cause.

"Mark has been part of Homeless Warrior since its inception in August 2023. He has been on the streets weekly looking for homeless veterans and has been a great ambassador for both Blesma and the veterans' community, providing hot drinks, food, toiletries and a listening ear," said Dennis Currie who leads the project. "He is a people person, and this is a great attribute when trying to get homeless veterans to



**Mark Rogerson supporting the Homeless Warrior initiative**

open up. Mark is a vital member of the Homeless Warrior team, and it is great to have him on board." Mark has certainly immersed himself in supporting his local community – well done Mark!

## HOME VISIT ACTIVITIES

During winter's colder months and shorter days, the many home visits we make, as well as the stop-offs to see Members in both hospital and residential care homes can become more meaningful and engaging by enjoying the therapeutic benefits of reminiscence. This can involve taking



**Graham Fergus will be raising funds for Blesma on a 10-day solo challenge**

a walk down Memory Lane using objects that bring back memories and start conversations. Simple activities like completing a jigsaw puzzle together or expressing creativity with arts and crafts can also spark the imagination, bring joy and instil a sense of accomplishment.

We must never underestimate the impact of sharing a cup of tea and a chat with someone, as well as the effect this can have on the broader family. As one family member shared: "Sarah enjoys the visits very much; she doesn't get much company, so it is a real treat for her."



## North East: Sport and socialising



**Crochet is my 'happy place'!**

### ROADSHOWS

The newly appointed NI Veterans Commissioner, David Johnstone and his team hosted the first Veterans Roadshow of 2025 in Cookstown. The event saw more than 20 organisations and 100 veterans attend. The aim of these roadshows is to connect with the veterans community,

fostering connections between veterans and showcasing support organisations that they can directly engage with. It is always great to have a Blesma Member along to support at these events, and Brian McKee was happy to help on this occasion. We are looking forward to the next series of events across Northern Ireland.

### FUNDRAISING

We are also looking forward to supporting Irish Guards veteran Graham Fergus in his fundraising campaign Operation HOME, which aims to raise awareness of homelessness in Northern Ireland. Graham will be raising funds for three charities; one of which is Blesma (see p12).

For 10 days in April, Graham will embark on a solo journey into the Mourne Mountains, carrying only essential supplies and enough food for a single day. Each day, he plans to trek 10 miles and will depend on the kindness and generosity of others to help him at his campsite each night.

"Blesma delivers, and I have witnessed the effects that raising money for the charity can have," said Graham.

*Fiona Morrison, Outreach Officer*



**Enjoying WheelPower's sports festival**

The new year was kicked off with an online activity as Members immersed themselves in a relaxing session on Zoom crafting a colourful mosaic coaster. Later in January, Woodmansey Garden Centre welcomed nine Members for lunch. The event buzzed with energy as everyone shared stories and enjoyed each other's company.

Then, on 30 January, our Members joined WheelPower for the first sports festival of the year at the English Institute of Sport Sheffield. This is the second year we have joined WheelPower to introduce our Members to a variety of sporting activities in the local area. Everyone had an opportunity to try exciting activities such as archery, wheelchair basketball, badminton, Para ice hockey and table tennis. A dose of healthy competition between the Members added to the day's fun, ensuring everyone had a fantastic time.

The beginning of February saw Members in the North East return to the Wetherby Whaler in York to enjoy fish and chips – with plenty of laughs to boot.

These events have set the tone for a year full of adventure and friendship, and we are looking forward to more activities in the coming months

*Heather Plowright, Outreach Officer*



**Fiona (right) attending the NI Veterans Commissioner's Roadshow in Cookstown**



# Scotland: Christmas lunches, footy tours and knickerbocker glories

**T**here were plenty of outreach activities and events to keep everyone busy in the run-up to Christmas. In late November, there was a Member-led online workshop to create beautiful ribbon wreaths in festive colours. Several families took part in a 'make at home' project designing their own advent calendars; and the 'Good Craic Christmas Quiz' saw Members across Scotland compete against each other with friendly rivalry. Festive lunches in Motherwell, Perth and Inverness ended the year in style, with lovely food and great company.

## FOOTBALL FANTASTIC

We 'kicked off' 2025 with a visit to Rangers Football Club for a tour of the iconic Ibrox stadium. It was fascinating to learn about the history of the club and explore the famous red brick stand. Upon showing us the changing rooms, our guide explained how the pegs in the visitors' changing room were much higher than those in the home team's room. In days gone past, this was to intimidate the visiting team and make them believe that Glaswegians were much taller than the average person! After a look in the trophy room and a walk down the tunnel to *Simply The Best* by Tina Turner, it was time for lunch at Edmiston House and a chance to explore the museum. A grand day out for young and old alike.

## WINTER LUNCHES

The winter months can be long and dark, so what better way to spend a cold winter's day than joining one of the Blesma lunches across Scotland? Starting off in Motherwell, Members came together in Dunfermline, Ayr, Perth, Forres, Aberdeen and Dundee to dine, spend time together and chat. Lunches always offer Members a great opportunity to share stories, reminisce and build friendships over indulgent, sugar-laden desserts!

## ONLINE AND 'AT HOME' ACTIVITIES

If Members and Widows are unable to get out and about, there are many alternative



Taking a tour around the trophy room at Glasgow Rangers Football Club



Christmas at the Black Watch Museum



Knickerbocker glories all round!



A festive ribbon wreath

ways to engage with Blesma Scotland's outreach programme. 'Make at home' kits are always popular, and January saw 20 Members receive mosaic kits in the post – they were able to take part in a very relaxing crafting activity and produced some beautiful results. The monthly online quiz is a good workout for the grey matter, and there's always plenty of banter included along the way. And if you are a bookworm, why not join our established book club? Just drop us a call or an email if you would like to take part.

**Rachael Kennedy, Outreach Officer**



## North West: Breakfasts, panto in Blackburn and big bucket collections

**T**he last few months of 2024 was a busy time for the North West, culminating in Christmas meals and the ever-popular pantomime at the Empire Theatre in Blackburn. The panto is becoming one of the highlights of the year, and we will be booking again for 2025.

The meals at Carlisle, Lytham and Charnock Richard were all well attended, and it was lovely to see so many Members chatting away. There was also a great variety of Christmas jumpers on display!

In addition to the Christmas activities, we held other activities throughout October and November including leather wallet making, Blesma breakfasts and a poppy resin workshop. All the activities were extremely popular and well attended.

It's been great to see so many Members coming along and engaging with the activities, including newer Members, and we will continue with a varied calendar of events throughout this year.

### HOME VISITS AND WELFARE

As the BSO, I continue to carry out home visits throughout the region, visiting new and established Members alike as well

as meeting with other veteran charities and service providers, and visiting Limb Centres in the region.

It's rewarding to visit Members, have a chat and offer assistance wherever it is needed. The North West has gained 13 new Members over the last year, and we continue to offer welfare support to all Members where possible. Please contact me if you need advice, support or a home visit.

### FUNDRAISING

A cold Friday in November once again saw a large group of Members and volunteers raising funds at Manchester Piccadilly train station with a bucket collection. Despite the weather and various train cancellations, which meant a quieter-than-usual Piccadilly, the team managed to raise a fabulous £1,745. This total included a record £427 from contactless donations which was incredible and in no small part down to one particular member, Jack Plant, who sweet-talked many commuters into tapping their card!

Thank you to everyone who came out to support us – it is very much appreciated.

*Amanda Brownlie, Support Officer*



The Manchester Piccadilly station bucket collection team raised a fabulous £1,745



## South West: Outreach and activities

**W**e had a very active last quarter to 2024, with a variety of meals including brunches, fish & chip meals and seven Christmas lunches across the region. The Christmas events alone saw more than 120 people coming together to enjoy each other's company.

It hasn't all been about food though, with the Christmas train of lights through the Dart Valley and clay pigeon shooting both well attended. Christmas wouldn't have been the same without a panto, and 20 Members and family members attended one in Plymouth.

I would like to thank all our Members for their support, and hopefully this year we will continue to deliver a fun-filled programme of events for them and their families. We are here to help and support in any way we can.

*Gordon (Nobby) Clark, Outreach Officer*



Top clay shooter Sonny Lee Smith



Christmas lunch, Plymouth style!



# Roy Hayward

17 April 1925 – 16 December 2024

**R**oy Hayward, who was one of the last surviving veterans involved in the D-Day Landings, passed away peacefully at his home, aged 99, in the weeks leading up to Christmas.

Roy was just 19 years old when he joined the Allied invasion, and lost both his legs in WWII when the tank he was in took a direct hit as his unit pushed into Normandy from Gold Beach in the days after D-Day.

“My wounds were a bit of bad luck and my thoughts are always with those who did not return home,” Roy would later tell *Blesma Magazine* with characteristic modesty.

At the 80th anniversary of the Landings, which were attended by Prince William in Portsmouth last year, Roy was given a standing ovation and was thanked by members of the Royal Family and senior figures for his service and sacrifice.

Roy joined Blesma after the war and represented Members’ interests as Isle of Wight Branch Treasurer when he retired from his job working in a bank.

“Roy was a remarkable person and he

**“We are honoured to have had Roy as a Member of our charity”**

will be sadly missed by so many people,” said Vivienne Buck, Blesma’s Chief Executive. “He did not complain or dwell on what happened. He just got on with life, commuting from his home in Surrey using rudimentary prosthetics to catch a train into London every day.

“Roy’s first concern was always for others, and he worked hard to represent Blesma Members during his time as a Branch official. He took a lot of satisfaction in helping other amputees and veterans.

“We were delighted to have known Roy at Blesma and honoured to have had him as a Member of our charity.”

Roy, who was awarded France’s highest



Roy, pictured several years ago in his garden on the Isle of Wight

military honour, the Legion d’Honneur, rarely spoke about his part in D-Day, but he joined the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry Tank Regiment as an 18 year old as the Allies geared up for the invasion. His unit landed on the evening of D-Day and soon saw action.

Roy was in a Sherman tank as troops clashed with the 12th SS Panzer Division at Fontenay-le-Pesnel. His tank was hit by a shell and immediately started to burn. He managed to push a fellow crew member to safety and, despite horrific injuries, got himself clear before the tank was engulfed in flames. Roy was rescued by medics and had his legs amputated at a nearby field

hospital before he was shipped back to Portsmouth for extensive treatment and rehabilitation in four different hospitals. He joined Blesma soon after.

“I got the feeling they were behind me and they were going to see I would get the pension and allowances that I might not have been able to get myself,” Roy would later say of the Association. “I felt they were on my side and always available, I didn’t need too much at first but it was good to know they were in my corner. It gave a feeling of confidence.”

Roy met his wife Barbara whilst working at the bank and they married in 1948 before later settling on the Isle of Wight.



# Jamie Weller

18 May 1970 – 29 November 2024

**J**amie Weller realised that he was going blind in the most inconvenient of places. “I was driving along a dual carriageway when I suddenly saw a car coming right at me,” he said. “Then I realised I was on the wrong side of the road. My retina nerves had started to deteriorate!”

Londoner Jamie, who was training to be a Sea Harrier Aircraft Engineer, managed to get off the road safely. But, at the age of 20, he realised his dream job was no longer going to be possible.

“I’d joined the Royal Navy at 18 and was top of my class in aviation engineering,” he told *Blesma Magazine* in 2018. “After noticing problems with my eyesight, I went to a consultant and was told that the damage was permanent and irreversible.

“People told me I wouldn’t be able to do anything, but I didn’t listen. I went to Warwick University and got a maths degree.”

Jamie became a tax accountant for Deloitte. “I used specialist scanners and reading devices. It was less exciting than being an Aircraft Engineer, but I was so proud when I qualified and felt I was changing perceptions of blind people.”

Meanwhile, Jamie had to relearn basic life skills and was helped by his guide dog, Freddie. “Guide Dogs get matched to their user. I’ve got two daughters, and Freddie is just right,” he said.

Jamie dedicated himself to numerous projects and charities. He joined the Armed Forces Para Snowsport Team and competed in Para Alpine and Nordic Skiing for Great Britain. He also competed in cycling and athletics at the 2017 Invictus Games, and climbed to Everest Base Camp in 2017.

“My life now is about using my experience to help others who face similar challenges, as well as being a fundraiser and a good father,” Jamie said in 2018. “I never say I’m disabled, I am a person who can’t see well. I manage my blindness, I don’t let it manage me!”

*The above is an extract taken from a longer interview with Jamie that first ran in Blesma Magazine in 2018*



Jamie was photographed with Freddie for *Blesma Magazine* in 2018

## Those who have passed away

May they rest in peace

ALEXANDER NC	9th Queen's Royal Lancers	16/12/24
ASHER DM	Widow	9/11/24
BACON J	Royal Air Force	13/12/24
BALDWIN K	Widow	27/02/21
BEARD VA	Widow	16/11/24
BLACK L	Widow	15/10/23
BLENKINSOP K	Widow	04/12/24
BRACKEN J	Royal Air Force	25/12/24
BURRELL DM	Royal Air Force	21/11/24
CHAMBERLAIN PR	Royal Air Force	23/10/23
CLARE PJ	Royal Marines	14/11/24
COOKSON GPJ	REME	07/02/25
COOPER GM	Royal Artillery	10/22/24
CROMACK B	Widow	29/11/24
DAVID K	Women's Royal Army Corps	12/11/24
FITZSIMONS JS	Queen's Royal Lancers	21/12/24
FRANCE P	Royal Air Force	20/01/25
GALLOWAY J	Royal Scots	20/03/24
GOULD HL	Royal Signals	18/02/24
HAYTON DR	Widow	12/12/24
HAYWARD SR	Notts Yeomanry	16/12/24
HELLIWELL JV	Royal Air Force	19/11/24
HOARE AP	Princess of Wales Royal Regiment	29/01/25
JONES R	The Queen's Dragoon Guards	04/01/25
KELLY DJ	Royal Corps of Transport	16/11/24
LAWRENCE BD	Royal Artillery	13/12/24
LAWRENCE S	Royal Air Force	16/01/25
MARTIN M	Royal Navy	06/01/25
MCNEILL J	Royal Armoured Corps	28/11/24
MEEN OG	Widow	15/01/25
MERCER RJ	REME	19/01/25
MEREDITH KB	Royal Navy	20/12/24
PENNY P	Widow	22/12/24
POPE A	Parachute Regiment	10/01/25
PRICE JI	Widow	16/12/24
REED V	Widow	04/12/24
RUTHERFORD A	Widow	02/12/24
SORENSEN JE	Widow	13/01/25
STENHOUSE CR	Widow	13/01/25
TATLOW WR	Royal Navy	28/11/24
TIPPEN MB	Royal Air Force	28/01/25
WEATHERALL PR	Parachute Regiment	10/11/24
WELLER JF	Royal Navy	29/11/24
WEST WN	Royal Army Ordinance Corps	25/09/24



# News from the Branches: What's been going on near you?



**The Lord Mayor of Southampton (left) with Branch Chairman David Rowe**

## **SOUTHAMPTON, WINCHESTER & DISTRICT BRANCH**

We hope everyone involved with Blesma had a good Christmas and a happy New Year. The Branch sadly had some bereavements in 2024. We lost Member Stephen Bailey, Widows Sybil Pink and Jacqueline Pritchard-Davies, and spouse Valerie McWilliams. Although she had left the Branch, sadly, Bonnie Harrison also passed away. The Branch sent its condolences to all the families, may they rest in peace. If anyone has lost relatives or friends, we also send them our condolences.

We were very pleased to be able to invite the Lord Mayor of Southampton and his consort to our Christmas lunch at Eastleigh Football Club's Silverlake Stadium. The other guests were Debbie Mayne from HQ, Pat Donnachie (BSO(S)) and Amy Barnes (OO(S)). We had an excellent lunch and would like to thank Caroline Pedrick, our Social Secretary, for organising such a successful event.

Our Chairman, David Rowe, organises a trip on the boat *Alison MacGregor* during the summer. If any Branch Member or Widow would like to go on it, they should

contact David on 02380 551891. Please leave David a message and he will ring you back.

At present, the Branch meets every fourth Monday at the Totton Community Centre to hear from a speaker and enjoy a buffet



**Gam Gurung gets into the festive spirit**

lunch. Should any Member or Widow who lives in the area wish to join the Branch, they would be most welcome and should contact myself on 01202 764168.

**Stephen Coltman OBE**

## **SUTTON, MERTON & DISTRICTS**

We at Sutton, Merton & Districts Branch hope all our Headquarters and other Branch friends are well.

Our Christmas lunch was well attended and as fun as usual. Members and canine friends enjoyed fabulous Christmas fare prepared and delivered by the team at the Morden Brook Hostelry, where we hold all our meetings and celebrations. The first Branch meeting of 2025 was lively, and we are hoping to arrange more Branch outings this year. The Branch is financially sound, our problem is that we require more Branch volunteers to organise the outings.

Hopefully, a lot of us will meet up again at Members' Weekend; a first-class event and it is wholeheartedly recommended that you attend.

**Annie Mac**

**Honorary Chair**

## **NOTTINGHAM BRANCH**

The Nottingham Branch continues to flourish, regularly welcoming new members and meeting throughout the year.

On 03 December we held our Christmas lunch at The Orchard Hotel and Restaurant. Almost 40 members, including family and carers, were able to enjoy a wonderful three-course festive meal. We were also pleased to welcome Ian Johnson, Blesma's Director Independence and Wellbeing.

On 11 February, we held our first Branch meeting and lunch of the year and were delighted that Blesma's Chairman, Ed Davis was able to attend. The Members really enjoyed meeting Ed and appreciated him taking the time to go around and chat individually with everyone in attendance.

Our planned meetings/lunches for 2025 will be held at The Vale Hotel, Daybrook, Nottingham on the following dates:

**13 May at 1230 for lunch**



# Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care

08 July at 1130 for a meeting/lunch  
09 September at 1230 for lunch  
11 November at 1130 for a meeting/lunch

This year, we are again planning to hold a Branch and Blesma fundraising/awareness event and cake stand at Thoresby Hall, Nottinghamshire on Saturday 10 May. This will be part of the Spirit of Wartime military event which we attended for the first time last year. It is an opportunity for our Branch members to raise some funds for the Branch and showcase the incredible ways that Blesma supports its Members.

The event is set in a beautiful location and has a very entertaining, family orientated timetable of activities throughout the day, including military tactics re-enactments, military bands and an RAF memorial Spitfire and Hurricane fly past. If any Blesma Members wish to attend, I am sure that they would enjoy it.

If you are interested in joining the Branch or finding out about our activities, please contact me on 07794 309927 or at [secretary.nottingham@blesma.org](mailto:secretary.nottingham@blesma.org)

**David Ledger**  
Honorary Secretary

## GREAT YARMOUTH & LOWESTOFT BRANCH

A busy 2024 saw members from the Great Yarmouth & Lowestoft Branch visit the National Memorial Arboretum, enjoy a summer's afternoon tea, and end the year with a Christmas lunch for almost 30 guests.

The Branch AGM and Lunch took place on Tuesday 04 March, when we discussed our plans for 2025. We welcomed two new members to the Branch in 2024 and continue to try to attract new members by engaging with our Outreach Officer, Francesca, and would invite any members from the Eastern region to join us.

If you want to join the Branch, contact Bob at [chair.yarmouth@blesma.org](mailto:chair.yarmouth@blesma.org) or on 07951 292681, or Helen on 07766 982904 or at [secretary.yarmouth@blesma.org](mailto:secretary.yarmouth@blesma.org)  
**Helen Cullen, Secretary**

**W**elcome 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 Blesma Support Officer for further information about their benefit entitlement or they can get in touch with Blesma's Benefits and Social Care Adviser Liz Watling on 020 8548 7080. These contact details are for Members only.

## UNIVERSAL CREDIT MIGRATION UPDATE

We have written before about the changing means-tested benefits system for working-age claimants. The benefits affected are known as legacy benefits and are:

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

Claimants of one or more legacy benefits will be written to by the Department for Work and Pensions and advised that their legacy benefits will be stopping and that they will need to migrate to Universal Credit. This will need a claim for Universal Credit to be made and the details will be in the letter, including the timescale to claim. The previous announced timetable for the migration has now been accelerated. It is now expected that the Tax Credits service will close on 05 April 2025 and all remaining accounts will be closed.

All other migration notices for legacy benefits are expected to be sent by the end of December 2025.

## WHEN YOU NEED TO ACT

To continue to receive financial support you must claim Universal Credit by the deadline date given in your letter – three months from the date the letter was sent.

If you cannot claim Universal Credit by the deadline date, you should contact the Universal Credit Migration Notice Helpline (details on the letter) as soon as possible. You may be given more time to make a claim if you have a good reason. You must





## Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care

request this before the deadline date on the letter.

If you require support with the Universal Credit claim process, please contact your Support Officer as soon as possible after receiving the migration notice. This is to allow time to give support before your deadline date. It remains the claimant's responsibility to advise the Department for Work and Pensions of a change in circumstance e.g. cease/become part of a couple, move home, a change in finances etc. This may trigger a move to Universal Credit sooner than receiving a migration letter.

### SOCIAL SECURITY SCOTLAND UPDATE

#### CARER SUPPORT PAYMENT

Carer Support Payment is a benefit for carers of a severely disabled person. The carer must live in Scotland and earn less than £151 per week (the earning rule increases to £196 per week in April).

Carer Support Payment became available across Scotland from November 2024, replacing Carer's Allowance. You cannot get Carer Support Payment and Carer's Allowance at the same time.

If you get Carer's Allowance and live in Scotland, you do not need to apply for Carer Support Payment as your benefit will move to Carer Support Payment automatically. This is happening between February 2024 and spring 2025.

The Department for Work and Pensions will send you a letter to say when your benefit will move to Social Security Scotland, and Social Security Scotland will send you a letter to say what will happen during the move. The Department for Work and Pensions will carry on paying your Carer's Allowance until Social Security Scotland starts paying your Carer Support Payment.

#### PENSION AGE DISABILITY PAYMENT

This year also sees a significant change to a disability benefit in Scotland for people over the age of 66.

Pension Age Disability Payment is replacing Attendance Allowance as the main disability benefit for people living in Scotland who have reached pension age. It has been gradually introduced for new claimants and will be available across the whole of Scotland from 22 April 2025.

Pension Age Disability Payment can support people with extra money if they have care needs because of a disability or long-term health condition. You do not need to have a carer; you may be finding your personal care takes you longer and is more difficult for you.

Pension Age Disability Payment is not means tested, which means any income and savings you have are not taken into account.

#### IF YOU ALREADY GET ATTENDANCE ALLOWANCE

You do not need to apply for Pension Age Disability Payment if you live in Scotland and get Attendance Allowance. Social Security Scotland will:

- Move you to Pension Age Disability Payment without you having to do anything at some point in 2025
- Send you a letter telling you what will happen when you transfer

The Department for Work and Pensions will continue to pay Attendance Allowance until Social Security Scotland takes over.

#### IF YOU ALREADY GET ADULT DISABILITY PAYMENT

If you already get Adult Disability Payment, you will stay on it when you reach State Pension age. You will not transfer to Pension Age Disability Payment.

***Blesma Members who live in Scotland can contact their Support Officer, Steve Burton for more advice. See p68 for his details.***

#### BENEFITS UPDATING 2025

Benefits are generally updated at the beginning of each tax year. This year, rates for those under 66 years of age are updated

by 1.7%. Those over 66 years of age will see an increase of 4.1% to new and basic State Pensions, and the Minimum Guarantee element of Pension Credit. Other benefits are uprated by 1.7%.

If you are receiving Carer's Allowance, or its Scottish equivalent Carer Support Payment, you will be able to earn more money before you lose the benefit. The weekly earnings limit has increased from £151 to £196.

Local Housing Allowance is the rate used to set the maximum amount of either Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit for people who rent in the private sector. The maximum amount varies by area, bedrooms required and the number of people per household. From April, Local Housing Allowance will be frozen at the 2024 rate.

If you are receiving a Department for Work and Pensions benefit you will receive a letter this month (March) confirming your new benefit payments.

#### NATIONAL LIVING WAGE

The National Living Wage will increase by 6%.

- For people aged 21 and over it will rise to £12.21 per hour
- For 18-to-20 year olds it will rise to £10 per hour
- For apprentices and those under 18, it will rise to £6.40 per hour

#### WAR PENSION RATES

If you are receiving a War Pension you will receive a letter from Veterans UK this month (March) confirming your new payment.

Following the uprating used in recent years, the increase to War Pension Scheme awards and allowances will be based on the Department for Work and Pensions' agreed increases for its disability benefits, which are in line with the previous September Consumer Prices Index (CPI). The CPI in September 2024 was 1.7%.

The following are the more relevant rates for Blesma Members...





WAR PENSION	APRIL 2025
100%	£239.00
90%	£215.10
80%	£191.20
70%	£167.30
60%	£143.40
50%	£119.50
40%	£95.60
30%	£71.70
20%	£47.80

The actual amounts paid may vary slightly from this due to the impact of the various component level rounding rules.

AGE ALLOWANCES PAYABLE FROM AGE 65	
40% or 50%	£15.95
60% or 70%	£24.60
80% or 90%	£35.00
100%	£49.20

CONSTANT ATTENDANCE ALLOWANCE	
Part day rate	£45.10
Basic rate	£90.20
Intermediate rate	£135.30
Exceptional rate	£180.40

MOBILITY SUPPLEMENT	
One rate	£86.00

INVALIDITY ALLOWANCE	
Under 40	£29.20
Under 50 but not under 40	£19.10
50 or over	£9.55

ALLOWANCE FOR LOWERED STANDARD OF OCCUPATION	
Maximum amount	£90.12

UNEMPLOYABILITY SUPPLEMENT	
Personal Allowance	£147.65
Wife or adult dependent	£82.05
First eligible child	£19.10
Second/subsequent children	£22.40

COMFORTS ALLOWANCE	
(Paid with Constant Attendance Allowance and Unemployability Supplement)	
Higher rate	£38.80
Lower rate	£19.40

EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE DISABILITY ALLOWANCE	
One rate	£90.20

SEVERE DISABILITY OCCUPATIONAL ALLOWANCE	
One rate	£45.10

CLOTHING ALLOWANCE	
£ Per annum	£308.00

THERAPEUTIC EARNINGS LIMIT	
Annual rate	£10,166.00

WAR WIDOW(ER)'S PENSION	
Widow(er) (Other Ranks)	£181.25
Supplementary Pension (Pre-1973 Widows)	£121.26



# Useful contact numbers across the Association

TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
<b>BLESMA SUPPORT OFFICERS</b>			
BSO (Prosthetics)	Brian Chenier	<b>M</b> 07796 715908	bsoprosthetics@blesma.org
BSO Eastern	Kevin Long	<b>T</b> 020 3954 3020 <b>M</b> 07825 536364	bsoeastern@blesma.org
BSO London & South East	Steven Burrell	<b>T</b> 020 7501 3030 <b>M</b> 07469 242277	bsolse@blesma.org
BSO Midlands	Vanessa Lucas	<b>M</b> 07825 536363	bsomid@blesma.org
BSO North East	Christine Landess	<b>T</b> 020 3954 3027 <b>M</b> 07917 972825	bsone@blesma.org
BSO North West	Amanda Brownlie	<b>M</b> 07825 536362	bsonw@blesma.org
BSO Scotland & Northern Ireland	Steve Burton	<b>M</b> 07766 258461	bsosniroi@blesma.org
BSO South	Pat Donnachie	<b>T</b> 020 3954 3026 <b>M</b> 07741 846106	bsosouth@blesma.org
BSO South West	Sarah Payne	<b>M</b> 07741 737563	bsosw@blesma.org
BSO Wales and West	Tom Hall	<b>T</b> 020 8548 7098 <b>M</b> 07780 165085	bsowest@blesma.org
Members Living Overseas	Steven Burrell	<b>T</b> 020 7501 3030 <b>M</b> 07469 242277	bsolse@blesma.org
<b>BLESMA OUTREACH OFFICERS</b>			
Outreach Officer Eastern	Francesca Anastasio	<b>M</b> 07741 661159	outreacheastern@blesma.org
Outreach Officer London & South East	Jess Linge	<b>M</b> 07741 845793	outreachlse@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Midlands	Joanne Sanders	<b>M</b> 07741 845429	outreachmid@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Northern Ireland	Fiona Morrison	<b>M</b> 07741 744617	outreachni@blesma.org
Outreach Officer North East	Heather Plowright	<b>M</b> 07350 364120	outreachne@blesma.org
Outreach Officer North West	Catherine Green	<b>M</b> 07741 846674	outreachnw@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Scotland	Rachel Kennedy	<b>M</b> 07884 695703	outreachscotland@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South	Amy Barnes	<b>M</b> 07435 283102	outreachofficersouth@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South West	Gordon Clark	<b>M</b> 07788 312747	outreachsw@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Wales and West	Jason Suller	<b>M</b> 07741 744141	outreachwest@blesma.org
<b>INDEPENDENCE AND WELLBEING</b>			
Head of Welfare Support	Colin Branch	<b>T</b> 020 8548 7090	hws@blesma.org
Benefits and Social Care Adviser	Liz Watling	<b>T</b> 020 8548 7080	iwabenefits@blesma.org
Grants Executive	Linda Harris	<b>T</b> 020 8548 3516	grantsexecutive@blesma.org
Membership, Branch and Volunteer Network Executive	Debbie Mayne	<b>T</b> 020 8548 7093	mbvexec@blesma.org
Welfare – Direct Line		<b>T</b> 020 8598 9459	
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>			
Head of Activities and Events	Jess March	<b>T</b> 020 8548 3519	activities@blesma.org
Events Coordinator	Clare Wellings	<b>T</b> 020 3954 3021	ae@blesma.org
Events Coordinator	Nicole Findlay	<b>T</b> 020 8548 7097	aelocal@blesma.org
<b>FUNDRAISING</b>			
Head of Fundraising	Anna Scalera	<b>T</b> 020 8548 3517	hf@blesma.org
Community and Events Manager	Abbie-Louise Thomas	<b>T</b> 020 8548 7089	communityeventsofficersnr@blesma.org
Corporate & Regional Fundraising Mgr	Chris Knight	<b>M</b> 07774 797318	crfm@blesma.org



TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
<b>COMMUNICATIONS</b>			
Marketing and Communications Manager	Nick Tuck	T 01299 896292	digitalmedia@blesma.org
Blesma Magazine			editor@blesma.org
<b>DIRECTORS</b>			
Chief Executive	Vivienne Buck	T 020 8548 3512	ce@blesma.org
Operations Director	Tony Bloomfield	T 020 8548 3513	od@blesma.org
Director Independence and Wellbeing	Ian Johnson	T 07881 308794	diw@blesma.org
Finance and Support Director	Boston Mwense	T 020 8548 3518	fsd@blesma.org
<b>USEFUL CONTACTS</b>			
Main Office		T 020 8590 1124	info@blesma.org

<b>BLESMA BRANCH OFFICIALS</b>			
<b>BOURNEMOUTH BRANCH</b>			
Chair	Peter Sherston-Baker		chair.bournemouth@blesma.org
Secretary	Mary-Jane Sweetzer		Please use Chair's email
Treasurer	Hazel Crofts		treasurer.bournemouth@blesma.org
Welfare Officer	Peter Sherston-Baker		Please use Chair's email
<b>GREAT YARMOUTH AND LOWESTOFT BRANCH</b>			
Chair	Bob Monkhouse		chair.yarmouth@blesma.org
Secretary	Helen Cullen		secretary.yarmouth@blesma.org
Treasurer	Simon Cavie		treasurer.yarmouth@blesma.org
<b>NOTTINGHAM BRANCH</b>			
Chair	Andy Fitzgerald		chair.nottingham@blesma.org
Secretary	Dave Ledger		secretary.nottingham@blesma.org
Treasurer	Keith Meakin		treasurer.nottingham@blesma.org
<b>SUTTON, MERTON &amp; DISTRICT BRANCH</b>			
Chair	Annie MacMillan		chair.sutton@blesma.org
Secretary	Karen Mason		secretary.sutton@blesma.org
Treasurer	Dave Hobson		treasurer.sutton@blesma.org
Welfare Officer	Gam Gurung		welfare.sutton@blesma.org
<b>SOUTHAMPTON BRANCH</b>			
Chair	David Rowe		chair.southampton@blesma.org
Treasurer and Secretary	Stephen Coltman		secretary.southampton@blesma.org
Welfare Officer	Jacqueline Brodrick		welfare.southampton@blesma.org

## Important information if you are emailing Blesma Branch officials

Anyone emailing a Branch official must use a specific Blesma email address rather than a personal account.

Previously, Members have been sending and receiving personal data in potentially unsecured emails, which has been placing the Association at risk of large penalties. Official Blesma Branch email addresses

have now been established (please see above) which ensure the Association is compliant with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

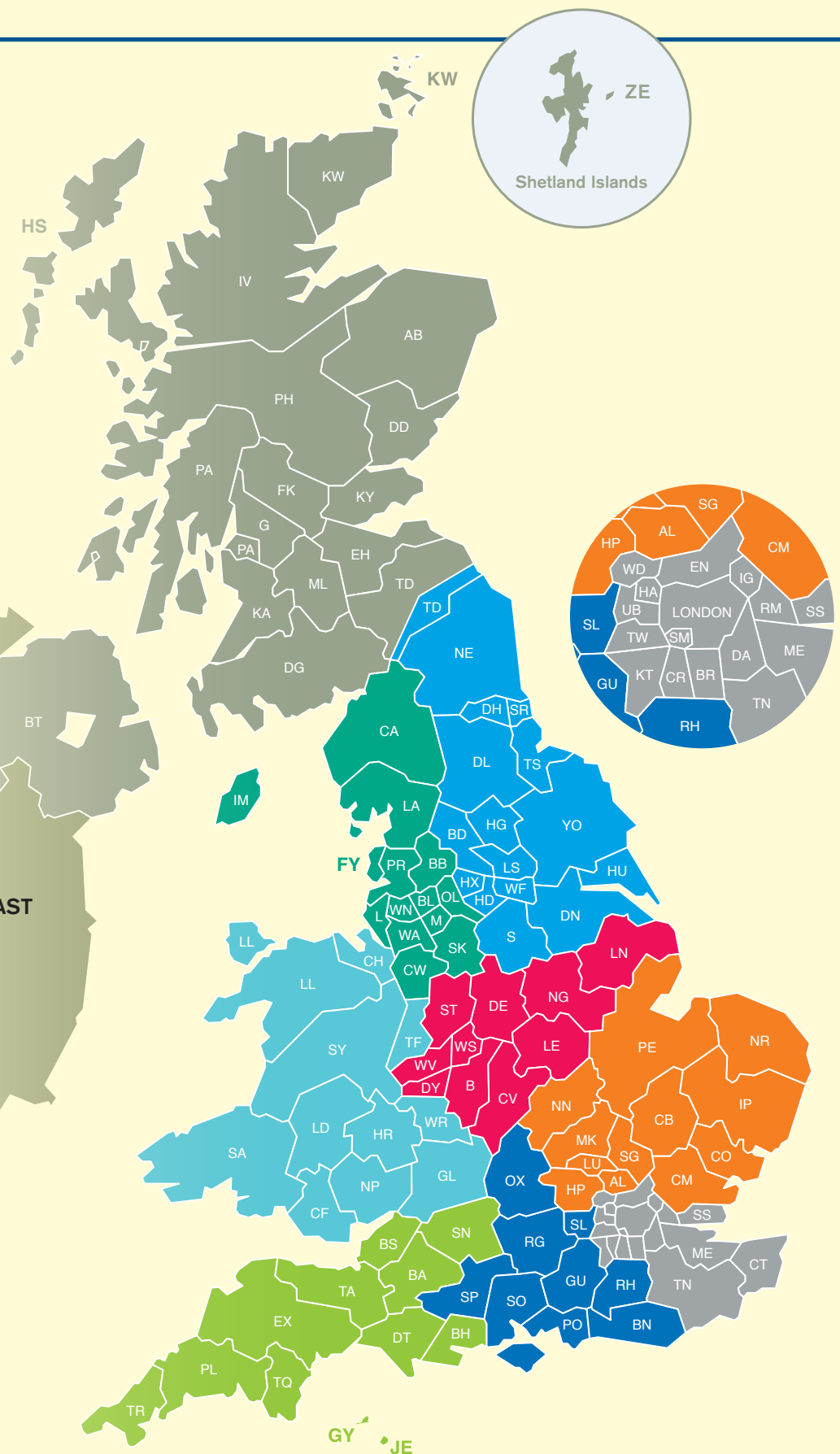
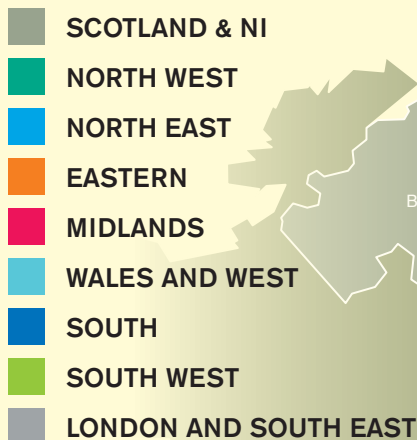
If you would like to send an email to a Branch official that is not related to Blesma activity, then personal contact information can still be used.





## 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.*





# Your *Will* could do wonders

Write or update your will for free and help Blesma provide lifelong support

**Claim your free will today:**

Online: Scan the QR code

Over the phone or in person: call 020 4525 3605 and quote Blesma to make an appointment

**Blesma**  
THE LIMBLESS VETERANS

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