



UNFORGOTTEN FORCES

Supporting Scotland's
Older Veterans

Countryside Camaraderie

Support for
remote and rural
older veterans



p2
Support
for LGBT+
veterans

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Female
veterans
in focus

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assistance

MAGAZINE

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The Unforgotten Forces magazine is for older veterans living in Scotland, their families, and carers.

We welcome reader feedback: you can contact us by phone, email or in writing. You can also use the details below to let us know if you no longer wish to receive the magazine.

Email: veteransproject@agescotland.org.uk

Telephone: **0333 323 2400**

Write to: Veterans Project, Age Scotland
Causewayside House
160 Causewayside
Edinburgh EH9 1PR

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Foreword

Welcome to the Unforgotten Forces magazine, and a Happy New Year.



Thank you to all who shared their views in our Readership Survey. It was great to learn that 91 percent of readers said they would recommend the magazine, and that 62 percent of you found it either 'very' or 'extremely' useful. We are sorry that a small percentage of readers are not positive. If you wish to change your subscription, to either stop it or request additional copies, or to receive the magazine electronically rather than in print, please contact us, by email to veteransproject@agescotland.org.uk or by calling **0333 323 2400**.

We were pleased to learn that some of you had followed up on the veterans' services mentioned in the stories and that, in at least a few instances, it had made a big difference to your quality of life. We heard that there was not enough content relevant to ex-service women, or for veterans in remote and rural areas. In response, we spotlight the needs of, and support available to, ex-service women on page 4, and on page 6 we have an extended feature on what's available to remote and rural veterans. We also look at support for independent living if you have a disability, on page 11, and help available during the energy crisis on page 13, these also being topics some readers requested.

The current Unforgotten Forces partnership grant runs to the end of March 2023, and we've applied to the Scottish Government for continuation beyond that date. At the time of print we haven't yet had a response, but we are optimistic that the Scottish Government will continue to invest in the partnership. Unforgotten Forces charities are not only committed to continuing to work in partnership, but also ambitious to increase and improve the support we offer veterans in Scotland aged 60 plus and will seek support from multiple funders to enable that.

On page 2 and 3 you'll find examples of the difference that partnership working can make, including how Fares4Free and Defence Medical Welfare Services (DMWS) are easing hospital journeys for veterans, and how we're working to reach and support more older LGBT+ veterans alongside our newest charity partner, Fighting With Pride.

Best wishes
Doug Anthony, Editor

New support for LGBT+ veterans in Scotland

Last Autumn Unforgotten Forces welcomed Fighting With Pride as a partner charity. Fighting With Pride is the LGBT+ military charity dedicated to supporting LGBT+ Veterans, serving personnel and their families, particularly those who were affected by the ‘gay ban’, ultimately lifted on 12th January 2000. Dougie Morgan is their Community Worker for Scotland.

Dougie, a 38-year Army veteran, went for the job because of his lived experience of LGBT+, mental health, and helping others. “In service I witnessed others who were mistreated, disowned, disgraced and eventually thrown out for being themselves.”

Dougie’s role is to support these veterans, many of whom are struggling mentally and physically, because of what happened to them. “Sadly, some of them are no longer here with us, haven taken their own life,” he says. While the current Independent Review into their treatment is “a light at the end of the tunnel”, it is also “bringing back the bad memories for people who have to speak and write about it.” Dougie is supporting them to submit evidence to the review.

“My longer-term aim is to set up drop-in centres in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, Aberdeen and Dundee for LGBT+ veterans, or family members, or serving military personnel,” he says. “Self-isolation is a huge issue, and people need safe spaces where they can speak freely and not be judged.”

Dougie would like to support LGBT+ veterans to make use of general veterans’ services. “There are people out there who are alienated from these services, both LGBT+ veterans and their family members.” Because “there are so many support organisations veterans don’t always know which one to turn to,” Dougie plans to “get out and meet LGBT+ veterans face-to-face so I can gain their trust and help them get support.” To do this he would like “to work with all the little local charities, as well as the national ones.”

Dougie would like LGBT+ veterans to know that they now have “a contact they can speak to regarding anything to do with their service, whether it was one or 70 years ago. I can offer friendship, empathy, a listening ear, and emotional support. Where required I can direct people to specialist treatment, or for financial support. We run activities including outward bound and arts and crafts. I’m not a Caseworker, so when someone approaches me, I won’t keep casework records.”



Dougie stresses that not every LGBT+ veteran needs support. “I’m also keen to hear from those who have experienced the bad times but are now able to be Ambassadors and can help spread the word.”

Get in touch with Dougie:

Dougie.morgan@fightingwithpride.org.uk

07704271392

Moving the partnership up a gear

With DMWS providing welfare support to veterans going through a period of NHS treatment, collaboration with Fares4Free, which provides transport solutions to veterans and families, has made sense since Unforgotten Forces began in 2017. Now, they've deepened that partnership, it gives their ability to support veterans a major boost. We spoke to Leon Fisher, Fares4Free Operations Manager, and Bob Reid, DMWS Regional Manager Scotland and Overseas, to find out more.

"Transport to healthcare appointments is a big issue for older veterans we support," says Bob. "It's complex. Some people want accompanied on journeys, some just want a phone call while enroute, and others want someone to meet them when they arrive. We've learned to be flexible and imaginative."

DMWS Welfare Officers are situated in the NHS Health Board Areas of Fife, Lothian, Scottish Borders, Lanarkshire and Greater Glasgow and Clyde. Until now they've provided welfare support in and around hospital but haven't been able to drive veterans to and from appointments. "We're giving our Welfare Officers, who would like to become Fares4Free volunteers, the opportunity to do so, so that they are fully trained and covered to take their veteran clients as passengers," says Bob.

Through the partnership DMWS can now reach into other health board areas. "We're geared up to provide welfare support on journeys to appointments in the Highlands," says Bob. "It's not an emergency service, rather for planned appointments. But we've got a network of welfare staff we can call on across Scotland, who work in partnership with Fares4Free's outreach support drivers to provide transport solutions where necessary, so with enough notice we can provide a service wherever needed."

"In the north-west we're working across a vast area and nine out of ten times we can find a solution," says Leon. "We continue to enhance and grow our volunteer network throughout the country removing the barriers rural living brings."

Under the bonnet, the mechanics of the partnership have been souped up. "We are a dual point of contact," says Leon. "Collaboratively, we take the time to find out exactly what's needed and then arrange a suitable solution. Working together this ensures that the client has only one point of contact throughout. Behind the scenes is powered by dedicated staff, frequent meetings, and efficient administration to ensure the service is of the best quality."



The DMWS and Fares4Free team

FIND OUT MORE

To request the escorted hospital appointment service contact either:

DMWS: 0800 999 3697 /
referrals@dmws.org.uk

or

Fares4Free: 0141 266 6000 /
bookings@fares4free.org

Fares4Free is actively seeking volunteer drivers across Scotland. To find out more about volunteering call **0141 266 6000**.

Time to focus on female veterans

Around 11 percent of the UK's estimated 2.5 million veterans are thought to be women. Being a minority within a minority, their experiences and needs have at times been overlooked by veterans' support services.

To help address this, the Unforgotten Forces partnership hosted a discussion at its Autumn 2022 conference with a panel of ex-service women, including recently appointed Scottish Veterans Commissioner Susie Hamilton. The aim was to raise awareness and encourage Unforgotten Forces partners, and others, to consider how they might better support older women in the ex-service community.

We heard from academics at Robert Gordon University, who have been funded by the UK Government Office for Veterans Affairs to research the challenges faced by female veterans in accessing support where needed after leaving military service. Professor Zoe Martin who leads the team, and is an Army veteran and Royal Navy military wife, said. "We're a rare breed, and sometimes we forget that."

Research suggests women face particular challenges in and after service. One study found that more than half of female veterans have experienced sexual assault and that, where reported, sexual assaults were often not taken seriously. Women have also reported that career progression in the Armed Forces was harder for them than for men, and that there were additional stresses such as balancing service with being a wife and (or) a mother. There can also be barriers to getting support after leaving the military, such as services not helping with childcare.



The Women's Royal Naval Service during WW2

In the discussion we heard that some older ex-service women won't consider themselves as veterans, for instance if they served with the Women's Royal Naval Service before women were allowed to go to sea. Others may be disinclined from joining veterans' groups or using veterans support services they perceive as male orientated, particularly if they felt their gender made them a target for bullying and harassment during service.

What was said in the Unforgotten Forces debate

It took quite a long time to be accepted. I felt I had to grow up really fast at age 18, and look out for the other girls.

Veteran

Some male colleagues told me that a WRAC is something you screw against a wall – that's what we had to put up with.

Veteran

It was hard to support my husband and family and have a career myself. You can't commit in employment to be somewhere for a year to a year and a half, so lots of the military wives didn't have jobs.

Military wife



Have your say on whether veterans' support services are female friendly

Email the research team at Robert Gordon University:
FemaleVetsResearch@rgu.ac.uk

A Wren's story

Karen Elliot is a National Trustee of The Association of Wrens and Women of the Royal Naval Services and Chairs the Association's Edinburgh and District Branch. She spoke to us about her military experience and the work of the Association in Scotland.



I was a Radar Plotter in the Wrens between 1984 and 1989. Initially I worked within a training establishment and taught lads to work as a tactical team in a ship (or aircraft) environment. Later I was based at HMQ Pitreavie ('The Pit') doing intelligence work, where I learned to use a coffee perculator!

Toward the end of my time the option of going to sea arose, but I chose not to. I was married and left to start a family. Back then, if you became pregnant, you were told to leave. I'm not sure how women manage military service with children. It was right for me to leave, but at the same time, I didn't really want to.

About a decade later I got involved with the Wrens Association, the Royal Naval Association, the Royal British Legion Scotland and SSAFA, for whom I was a caseworker, for around 25 years. I needed something more than being a mum and being part of the Armed Forces community again was awesome. Currently, most women in the Wrens Association are a bit older, but we share a bond that you don't get in civilian workplaces, and we are actively seeking Members who are currently serving and/or recently left the Royal Naval Service.

All of us look back positively on the solidarity, the sense of belonging and of contributing to something important and special. I grew up a very shy girl in a wee village and the Navy gave me experiences and confidence I would never otherwise have had. Us Wrens, we boosted each other, friends or not, and nobody put you down. That team spirit carries on in the Association.

The first Wrens who were allowed to go to sea found it tough. They just wanted to do their job and be equal, but there was some challenges and negativity to overcome, especially from Navy wives and girlfriends. Also, not being able to have a family in service was difficult. Some older ladies say they were told to leave when they got married! Today, service women can do anything men can, the conditions on ships are much better and people are more connected. But it's taken a long time,

The Wrens Association is for camaraderie, but we link in with Wrens Benevolent Trust so if someone is in difficulty or needs to retrain, there's support. New members are always welcome. We have two branches in Scotland (Edinburgh and District, and Fife), and an Informal Group (Glasgow), plus a national virtual branch with about 20 ladies who attend online monthly using Zoom. We also have a 'Scottish Wrens Gatherings' Facebook page, where from time-to-time we arrange a meet up somewhere in Scotland – purely social and not limited to Members of the Association.

WOMEN'S SERVICE ASSOCIATIONS

For further information and to join.

Wrens Association: <https://wrens.org.uk> / Tel. 02392 725141

Women's Royal Army Corps Association: Email. info@wraca.org.uk / Tel. 0300 400 1992

Women's RAF Association: Email. waafasecretaryATgmail.com

Countryside camaraderie

Scotland's ex-service men and women are mostly found in the country's central belt and bigger cities, as with the population generally, and that's where support for them is concentrated. Yet while those in remote and rural areas may be fewer in number, they deserve the same support and can be more cut-off socially. That's why we're dedicating an extended feature about support for them in this issue.

We profile some of the camaraderie and support opportunities available to the older ex-service community in remote and rural areas and include information about online directories where you can find more. If you don't have internet access, you can call the Age Scotland helpline (0800 12 44 222) and we'll do the search for you.

The Legion goes north

Emily Clark is Legion Scotland's Veterans Community Support Coordinator for the Highlands, Islands and Grampian. She coordinates volunteers who support socially isolated veterans

For Emily accessibility is the key challenge. "The distances here are much greater, and it can be a three or four hour round trip for a volunteer, which may not be sustainable. If a veteran client can meet a volunteer half-way, great, but often that's not possible."

Volunteer availability is also limited. "We might have only one volunteer covering, say, the whole of Caithness, and there is a limit to how much time that volunteer can give. So, where we find a concentration of veterans needing our support, we try and bring them together. That makes it easier for us and they can enjoy more camaraderie."

Legion Scotland works with and makes the most of Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs where available. "But sometimes for these a volunteer may need to set out very early on a freezing and dark morning to pick up the client, who may also be reluctant to go out at that hour." So, groups that Emily is working to establish in Dingwall, Forres, and on the Buchan coast, will be for lunches. "Our clients will be able to enjoy warmth, a hot meal and camaraderie for a few hours" she says.

Collaboration with other organisations is vital. "An example is with a great organisation in Aberdeenshire called Networks of Wellbeing which has set up a couple of veterans clubs" says Emily. "They offer lots of activities and therapies, and we have the volunteers, so we complement each other."

Emily encourages veterans in her patch to get in touch. "We've been asked to help set up warming points for veterans this winter, and we're doing our best to make these happen" she says. "If we find that there are even two or three other veterans needing support in, say, 20 miles of you, we may be able to set up a new group. Also, lunch groups we set up won't be drop-ins, so veterans who would like to come will need to contact me first."

Contact Emily: e.clark@legionscotland.org.uk / 07876 202437
www.legionscotland.org.uk/befriending

Legion Scotland has over 140 Branches and 60 associated Clubs, many in rural areas. Search the online directory www.legionscotland.org.uk/branches-and-clubs

A view from the islands

Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs offer regular informal camaraderie. Simon Brodie helps run the Orkney club.

“It can be challenging for older veterans in rural areas,” says Simon. “Especially for those who aren’t on various social media platforms where a lot of support is advertised. There’s also less choice. If a veteran has a problem with local support, such as there’s a personality clash, there may be no alternative option.”

Simon is also concerned that some national veterans’ charities prioritise areas where they can make the biggest impact with their money, but that isn’t necessarily where the need is most. “I can understand why they do that, but it doesn’t help the rural veterans. If a service closes, there may not be any other option for them.” Simon believes that personal challenges can be higher for some rural veterans “as often people move to rural areas because they can’t deal with life in busier locations.”

The pandemic was a challenge for the Orkney Breakfast Club. “We struggled to keep people connected, and some members drifted away,” says Simon. “We try to pass on as much useful information about the support that’s out there to our members as possible. We’re lucky that one of our club members is also the SSAFA representative for the area and can often help if someone has a problem. We also build connections with the community so that we can direct veterans to local support organisations where helpful, and vice versa.”

Simon says publications such as Unforgotten Forces magazine are valuable for “connecting members with the wider veteran community. We pass it around so people can have a read and know what’s there.”

The Orkney Breakfast Club meets on the last Saturday of every month. “It’s very relaxed - just turn up, pay for breakfast, and that’s it. We’re open to anyone from any nation that has done military service. Members will lift share on an informal basis. If someone can’t afford breakfast, we’ve a small fund based on members’ contributions we can use to cover the cost.” The club rotates around a handful of venues that can accommodate people with disabilities. “Our next meet will be in Kirkwall Airport café. Between 12 and 20 people come along each time, but really the minimum you need for a successful club is two people who want to meet for a brew and a chat.”

Contact Simon:
07909 640884
sibrodie01@gmail.com

Or look up ‘Orkney Armed Forces’ and Veterans’ Breakfast Club’ on **Facebook**.

Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs have been set up in locations from Caithness to Stranraer. Search for them online: **www.afvbc.net/club-search**



The Orkney Breakfast Club
(photo Martin Laird)

Combatting rural stress

Rachel Speed is a Community Psychiatric Nurse with Combat Stress in Highland. She explains some of the issues for veterans in the area who need mental health support, and how Combat Stress is supporting them.

“Physical access to support is an issue. There is no guarantee of public transport in the area, so unless they have their own transport veterans can find it hard to get to appointments,” says Rachel. “We do however have Fares4Free, which cover all areas and to whom we frequently refer.”



Rachel found the pandemic experience both a help and a hinderance. “With help from charity Abilitynet we set up veterans we support with tablets and the internet so we could offer more online support. Now if someone who lives on one of the islands, for instance, they don’t have to arrange a ferry and overnight stay for a one-hour appointment.”

As online support became easier physical support became harder. “Some places we previously supported veterans became unavailable, but now we’re finding that other organisations are offering us space. Soon we’ll have a presence in the 3 Scots Welfare Centre on Wimberly Way in Inverness. Historically, the majority of veterans supported in this area have been older and often they much prefer meeting face to face over a cup of coffee.” Combat Stress aspires to reach further north as “we recognise getting to Inverness is difficult for some people.”

Social isolation is a big issue in the rural areas, with many veterans choosing to move to more secluded areas to avoid the anxiety of being in crowds. However, Rachel’s colleagues Sean Smith and Sarah-Jane Robertson co-ordinate Scotland’s peer support. “Once a month they run a group in Burghead, Moray, and they arrange online peer support. There is also informal peer support between meetings. Veterans who used to attend the drop in at Poppyscotland in Inverness still meet each Friday in a local café. We pop in when we can to maintain relationships. We’ve recently added a Substance Misuse Practitioner to our team, and we collaborate with NHS and other charities to ensure we meet veterans’ holistic needs.”

Rachel’s message to older veterans in Highland who need mental health support is “please reach out to us. Very few veterans have heard we have a service as far up as the Highlands. Don’t feel your location will exclude you from getting help. Our team is small, but we’re incredibly enthusiastic and committed to providing the best care possible to our veterans. I feel utterly privileged to work for Combat Stress and be the person that a veteran trusts to speak with about their needs, I will always be in awe of the resilience and strength of each veteran I meet.”

Contact Combat Stress:

0800 1381619 / text 07537 173683

helpline@combatstress.org.uk

<https://combatstress.org.uk>

A light in Scottish Borders

From its café hub in Hawick, First Light Trust offers wellbeing support to Armed Forces veterans and former members of the emergency services in Scottish Borders, and beyond. We spoke to charity Chief Executive Officer Dorinda Wolfe Murray.

“Veterans seek our support for challenges including homelessness, benefits problems, loneliness, and poor mental wellbeing. We listen and can help them unravel their issues, find a way forward, and connect with their local community,” says Dorinda.

First Light Trust began in Scarborough in 2012. Hawick was chosen as its first Scottish location as part of a plan to ensure veterans are no more than an hour and a half from a café hub. “We’re cross-border, and for veterans in the north of England Hawick is fairly easy to reach,” says Dorinda. “But also, Scottish Borders is hugely under-resourced for veterans.”

Anyone can drop into the Hawick café hub. “We want our veterans to meet people in the community, and to be accepted and understood. Local support has been fantastic.”

Dorinda, who grew up near Hawick, sees specific challenges to supporting veterans in Scottish Borders. “There can be suspicion of outsiders, which I find even having family roots here going back 1000 years,” she says. “And local rivalries, such as between Galashiels and Hawick.” Dorinda has also noticed that the economy is more cash-based than in other areas, with less trust in services such as banks that ask for personal data. “Many veterans are fiercely independent and protective of their privacy, and that’s a challenge as for us to be an ‘above-board’ charity there are questions that we must ask,” she says. “We use charm and humour, but even so it can take years to build up trust.”

Dorinda has noticed certain veterans are drawn to rural occupations. “Gardening, forestry, gamekeeping and being a ghillie – those with service-related injuries or mental health problems, perhaps from Northern Ireland or the Falklands, often find solace in such practical outdoors work. We can support them, for example helping those with acquired brain injury understand that there are ways to come to terms with it. With time and face-to-face care, we find there’s always an answer, although not necessarily the one someone originally wanted or expected.”

There are also wider challenges to reaching clients in the area. “Internet and mobile reception can be poor here,” says Dorinda, “and public services are horrendously over-stretched.” To overcome these First Light Trust works closely with local partners. “We collaborate with others including Defence Medical Welfare Services, Citizens’ Advice, SSAFA, Veterans First Point, plus civilian services such as GPs and housing associations.”

First Light Trust offers remote support to veterans in other parts of Scotland and, with an outreach worker now in post in Falkirk, will open its second café hub there in 2023. “My ambition is to have more support workers in Scotland,” says Dorinda. “And I’d love us to have a mobile coffee van. There’s nothing like a cuppa and a conversation to put trust in place. Sometimes all that’s needed is for someone to feel heard, to know that someone cares, and then they can then find the solution for themselves.”

Contact First Light Trust:

0207 730 7545 / enquiries@firstlighttrust.co.uk / www.firstlighttrust.co.uk

The First Light Café Hub:

1-3 High Street, Hawick, TD9 9BZ. Monday-Saturday 10am-3pm.

Shedding rural isolation

Men's Sheds offer a friendly, welcoming, and healthy environment for men (aged 18 and over) to socialise, work on personal and/or Shed projects and take part in activities together with a purpose. Army veteran Richard Packer, a member of Fraserburgh and District Men's Shed, shares how becoming a 'Shedder' has transformed his life.

My wife Lynne and I moved to Aberdeenshire in 2014 into veterans housing and I struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). I first heard about Men's Sheds in 2019. I was apprehensive at first. I had not been out in a very long time.

The Shed felt welcoming, like I had always been there. I mingled in and they accepted me. The Shed has built up my confidence immensely, I am now able to do other things in my life and it has really brought me out of my shell.

My service dog, Ace, and I go along to the Shed regularly. Everyone loves him and treats him as their dog—they have adopted him really. Through my newfound confidence, I was inspired to get involved with my local cricket team and from that, we now have some of the cricketers coming along to the Shed and the Shedders are also joining the cricket club too.

The Shed has impacted on my health too. I feel less stressed. My mood has improved, and I don't get annoyed at the little things anymore.

I have gone from staying at home and feeling isolated to joining the Shed, becoming a Trustee, and even changing other people's lives. I now feel like anything is possible and am proud to take an active role in improving my community and impacting on the health and wellbeing of people in our local area.

Now, I am setting up a new Shed with my fellow Trustees and attending regional Shed Network meetings representing our members' interests and loving every minute of it. It is exciting times for all of us and I am immensely proud to be a part of this journey."

Follow Fraserburgh and District Men's Shed on Facebook:
www.facebook.com/groups/259875868239742

There are more than 200 open and developing Men's Sheds in Scotland.
You can find them online: <https://scottishmsa.org.uk/find-a-shed>



Interview by Scottish Men's Shed Association, an Unforgotten Forces partner.

Richard with dog and fellow shedders

Support for independent living

Most people want to live independently and safely in their own home, but as you become older, you might start to need help with things you used to be able to manage for yourself.

If you are living with a disability and need care or support or someone to keep an eye on you so you can stay safe, you may qualify for a disability benefit. If you are under 66 you can claim Adult Disability Payment from Social Security Scotland; if you are 66 or over, you can claim Attendance Allowance from the Department for Work and Pensions. You may also be entitled to additional help if you are caring for someone who receives a disability benefit.

The Age Scotland Helpline (0800 12 44 222 / <https://age.scot/helpline>) offers online and telephone benefit checks, and free advice guides on these and other benefits. You can also contact the Armed Services Advice Project (0808 800 1007) which also offers benefit checks and, in several areas, can provide more in-depth support including help to apply for benefits.

There may be care, support, equipment or adaptations which could help you to manage better at home. Responsibility for providing care, equipment or minor adaptations is split between your local council and NHS, who should work closely together. To find out more, contact the Age Scotland Helpline, which also offers free guides to Care and Support at Home covering practical support and how to get funding for it. The Helpline can also explain unpaid carer's rights and provide advice guides regarding them.

Several Unforgotten Forces charities offer practical and (or) financial support to older ex-service men and women with health conditions and disabilities that make independent living more challenging.

SSAFA, Poppyscotland, and the RAF Association offer financial support to enable independent living. Poppyscotland also has a team of welfare officers and independent living advisors.

SSAFA:

0141 488 8552 / www.ssafa.org.uk

Poppyscotland:

0131 550 1557 / gethelp@poppyscotland.org.uk

RAF Association:

0800 018 2361 / <https://rafa.org.uk>

Sight Scotland Veterans:

Practical support and social and activity opportunities for veterans with sight loss.

800 035 6409 / <https://sightscotland.org.uk>

Defence Medical Welfare Services:

Support for veterans undergoing NHS treatment in an increasing number of areas.

0800 999 3697 / referrals@dmws.org.uk

Fares4Free:

Help for veterans to get to and from vital appointments, groups, and clubs.

0141 266 6000 / www.fares4free.org

Highland Veterans Handyperson Service:

Help for older veterans in Highland and Moray with small jobs and repairs.

01349 884774 / handyperson@ilmhighland.co.uk

Spotlight on Blesma

Most people want to live independently and safely in their own home for as long as possible, but as you become older you might start to need help. Blesma, the limbless veterans charity, recently joined the Unforgotten Forces partnership and exemplifies the support for independent living available to the Armed Forces community. We spoke to their team in Scotland, Outreach Officer **Emma Gratton**, and Support Officer **Steve Burton**, about what Blesma can offer.

“We’re here to ensure that all serving or ex-service men and women who have lost sight, limbs or the use of limbs can lead independent and fulfilling lives and will not be failed, forgotten or left behind” says Emma. “We provide both practical and emotional support.”

A key part of Blesma’s approach is fellowship and enabling its members to support each other. “We have regular activities online and in-person,” says Emma. “For example, we have a Prosthetic and Pain Management Forum online, where members get updates about NHS Limb Centres from Steve, and he can help with specific issues. But a vital part is that our members can also talk about experiences and share tips which will help their health and wellbeing.”

There’s a wealth of social and emotional support on offer. “I provide regional support, which ranges from meeting members for lunch to taking them Quad-biking,” says Emma. “We offer a range of online activities such as crafting, book club, and baking competitions where members bake with their families and send me photos of the results. We seek to reach and support Blesma members across mainland Scotland and on some Islands. Some rural members are online, and where necessary we’ll link people with other military and non-military charities who can provide direct local support. Outreach also includes home visits.”

“We also take our members further afield, with everything from skiing in France to surfing in Cornwall,” says Emma. “We try to accommodate people with different ages, abilities, and interests, so we’ll also have central activities like widows week and seniors week. Earlier this year, I supported a group of senior members from across the UK to a hotel in Somerset. It was great as they were able to do lots of activities, from archery to spa treatments.”

Blesma also provides tangible and informational support. “We offer a wide range of support such as advice on War Pensions, AFCS and DWP Benefits, including independent advocacy and support with Appeals and Tribunals. Financial help through grants is a crucial element for our members and this can range from help buying mobility aids to funding a wet room in a member’s home,” says Steve. “Whilst we expect funding to be provided by statutory services, there are a number of areas where it is not, so Blesma will fund those gaps. Other examples of what we can help with include replacing white goods, the cost of moving home, putting flooring in and carpets, gardening grants and maintenance, and more recently assistance with the cost-of-living crisis. Independent Advocacy has gathered pace over the last couple of years, especially around the challenges with Health and Social Care support”, say Steve. “Emma and I provide a wide range of support to our members which includes referral to our partners within the consortium and other charities, so the service is hopefully comprehensive and allows members to enjoy a life under difficult and diverse circumstances.”

Blesma membership is open to every ex-service person who loses limbs, an eye, or has permanent loss of speech, hearing or sight of an eye or the loss of use of limbs. The Association also supports dependants of its members and in particular their widow(er)s. Membership applications are assessed in the Head Office and the membership cost is £1 per year, or £2 for life.

Contact Blesma in Scotland

Call Steve Burton: **07766 258461** / Email bsosniroi@blesma.org

Web <https://blesma.org>

THE KNOWLEDGE

A round up of hot topic information and new opportunities

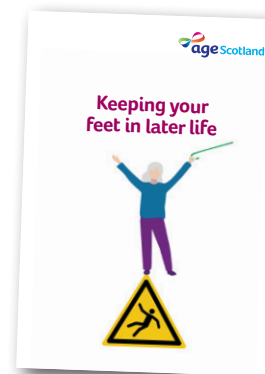
Worried about energy bills this winter?

Age Scotland publishes a **Warm and Well** advice guide with money saving tips and information on who can help. To request it, and for advice, call the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222**. The charity also offers online workshops that will give you a better understanding of your household energy use, support you to stay warm and save money on bills, and help you to be prepared if there's a power cut. To book on a workshop visit <https://age.scot/energy>.



Keeping your feet this winter

Winter weather increases the slips outdoors, but there are steps you can take to reduce the risk and make recovery more likely if you have an accident. Age Scotland's **Keeping your feet in later life** guide offers advice for staying confident and steady on your feet. If you have fallen or had a close call, its partner guide **Worried about slips, trips and stumbles** offers advice on staying safe, getting back up, and support available from health services. To request the guides, call the **Age Scotland helpline** **0800 12 44 222** or <https://age.scot>.



A big change in the benefits system

After the independence referendum in 2014, plans were made for some powers over social security to be devolved to Scotland. The Scottish Government has set up new agency, Social Security Scotland, with one main phone number, **0800 182 2222**. People who need help to make a claim because they are living with a disability can be supported by taxpayer-funded advocacy from the charity **Voiceability** - www.voiceability.org.

Benefits delivered so far include **Carer's Allowance Supplement** to top-up **Carer's Allowance**, **Funeral Support Payment** to help with the cost of a funeral, and **Adult Disability Payment**, replacing **Personal Independence Payment**. People already receiving Personal Independence Payment will automatically be transferred onto Adult Disability Payment by summer 2024; they will receive letters from the Department for Work and Pensions and Social Security Scotland to confirm the change.

More change is on the way, including the **Winter Heating Payment**. This will replace the £25 **Cold Weather Payments** that were paid to people receiving Pension Credit if it was below freezing for a week locally. Instead of being linked to weather, this will be a one-off payment of £50 in February 2023.

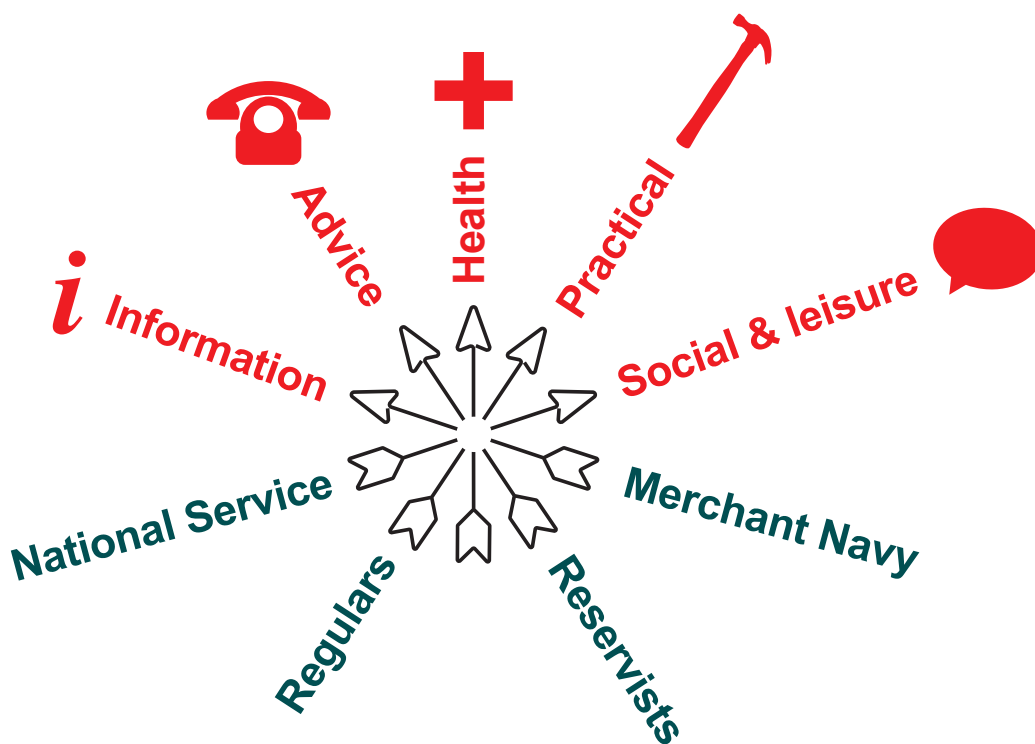
For more information and advice guides call **Age Scotland helpline** **0800 12 44 222**. Age Scotland also runs online workshops the explain the changes www.age.scot/benefitsworkshop.



UNFORGOTTEN FORCES

Supporting Scotland's Older Veterans

If you are aged 60 or older, live in Scotland, and served in the British Armed Forces, Unforgotten Forces is your doorway to camaraderie and extra support, should you need it.



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www.unforgottenforces.scot

0800 12 44 222

(The Age Scotland helpline can connect you with Unforgotten Forces services if you are unsure who to approach)

