



UNFORGOTTEN FORCES

Supporting Scotland's
Older Veterans

Get out!

Veterans'
outdoors
stories



p6
Tribal art:
veterans
get creative

p8
SSAFA
unpacked

p12
Interview:
Scottish Veterans
Commissioner

MAGAZINE

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Contents

Foreword	1
Unforgotten Stories	2
Tribal art	4
Creative fun our new partner Veterans Tribe Scotland	
SSAFA unpacked	6
The UK's oldest tri-service charity joins Unforgotten Forces	
Get out!	8
Outdoor opportunities for veterans	
Interview: Scottish Veterans Commissioner	10
Meet Susie Hamilton	
We are the champions!	11
Public sector Veterans Champions explain their role	
The knowledge	13

Cover image courtesy of Centre for Ageing Better

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

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Foreword

Welcome to Unforgotten Forces magazine.



This issue we highlight the fantastic work of two of our newest Unforgotten Forces partners. On page 6 you can read about SSAFA, the Armed Forces Charity that finds practical and financial solutions for veterans in need. And enabling veterans to discover their creative side is Veterans Tribe Scotland, introduced on page 4. For what's new with our other partners see our Unforgotten Stories on page 2. These now include Blesma, a charity supporting veterans with limb loss. As Blesma only joined Unforgotten Forces in August you'll find just a brief summary of its services in this issue. We look forward to telling you more about the fantastic support Blesma offers in future issues.

On page 10 the newly appointed Scottish Veterans Commissioner, Susie Hamilton, shares her ambitions for the role. We also hear on pages 11-12 from a Council and an NHS Veterans Champion about their efforts to improve the welfare of local veterans. With the Armed Forces Act of 2021 introducing a legal duty for public services to apply the Armed Forces Covenant, the nation's promise to ensure fair treatment for all who have served with HM Forces, the Champion role is now more important than ever.

As the nights draw in, getting outdoors can be less appealing. That's why on page 8 we highlight the benefits of being in nature all year round, with stories from the gardening gurus at Forces of Nature in Glasgow and history buffs with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Lastly, we'd love to hear what you think about Unforgotten Forces magazine. Inside you'll find a short readers' survey questionnaire and freepost envelope, or you can complete the questionnaire online at www.age.scot/ufmagazine. Responses that include complete name and postal details will be entered into a prize draw to win a £100 Amazon Voucher.

Best wishes
Doug Anthony, Editor

Unforgotten stories

Blesma joins Unforgotten Forces

We welcomed Blesma as our newest partner in August. Blesma offers life-long support to serving and ex-service men and women with limb loss and loss of use of limbs, including widows and widowers.

Steve Burton, Support Officer for Scotland, says “We offer information and advice on a wide range of topics. We can provide advocacy support on issues that concern our members, including the best use of prosthetics and mobility aids. We also offer financial assistance to aid independence and wellbeing. I’ll visit veterans at home or at work, if necessary. My colleague Emma runs a programme of fun, social and inclusive face-to-face and online activities that boost our members’ wellbeing.”

Blesma membership is £1 for a year or £2 for life. “You can join if you have lost, or lost use of, one or more limbs. Your disability might have been because of combat or training injuries, or the result of something like a road traffic accident or a physical traumatic event. The support is the same regardless.”

Contact Steve Burton: **07766 258461** | bsosniroi@blesma.org | <https://blesma.org>

Pilgrims remember the Somme

In June, 35 pilgrims and four staff departed Edinburgh for a Legion Scotland and Unforgotten Forces pilgrimage to the Somme. “It was a very memorable and poignant five days of remembrance and comradeship,” said **Tommy Douglas**, Legion Scotland Veterans Community Support Manager. “It gave us a new understanding of what it meant to take part in the Great War of 1914 – 1918.”

The pilgrimage included the breath-taking Vimy Ridge War Cemetery, the design for which came to architect Walter Allward in a dream, and the Arras Memorial, which commemorates 35,000 soldiers from the UK, South Africa, and New Zealand with no known grave. Among them is Walter Tull, the first black professional footballer and one of the first black officers in the British Army. There were also tours of the Somme and Ypres battlefields. “At Ypres we visited the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing, which commemorates nearly 55,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers who died in the Salient between 1914 and 1917,” said Tommy.



Contact Veterans Community Support Manager Tommy Douglas: **0131 550 1560** | support@legionscotland.org.uk | www.legionscotland.org.uk/befriending

Escorted patient journeys across Scotland

Defence Medical Welfare Service (DMWS) and Fares4Free are jointly offering a service for ex-service men and women who need transport and support for hospital and other medical appointments. Fares4Free provides free transport to these appointments, with veterans accompanied and supported by a DMWS Welfare Officer. This service is available Scotland-wide.

Ryan Gordon, DMWS Welfare Officer for Fife, says: “A period of medical treatment can bring emotional and practical challenges in addition to the health condition. Together DMWS and Fares4Free can take the hassle, worry and cost out of transport to and from appointments for veterans, and provide a wide variety of support to improve wellbeing.”

Contact DMWS: **0800 999 3697** | referrals@dmws.org.uk | <https://dmws.org.uk>

A new gym for Erskine's Reid Macewen Centre

Members at Erskine's Reid Macewen Activity Centre have been enjoying fantastic new gym facilities, made possible by a £25,761 grant from the Veterans Foundation. The equipment includes a punch bag, squat and mobility stations, skiing, rowing and cardio equipment, weights and selection of medicine and slam balls. These are designed to maintain functional fitness, focusing on performance as opposed to muscle size.

The request for the gym came directly from the members. Many had experienced challenges when making use of public facilities, which do not often cater for amputees or physical disabilities and can be overwhelming for someone living with PTSD.

Centre Manager **Debra Dickson** says: "We are absolutely delighted with our new gym; it has been the final piece of the puzzle on our refurbishment journey. Over a third of our members have completed their induction and the space is quickly becoming one of the most popular within the centre. We already have veterans reporting considerable mental and physical benefits.

Contact Debra Dickson: **0141 814 4534** | debra.dickson@erskine.org.uk
www.erskine.org.uk/get-support/reid-macewen-activities-centre



Central-Scotland hubs for Combat Stress

Combat Stress has continued to provide care and treatment to veterans with complex mental health needs throughout the pandemic; the organisation has recently moved to two new locations in the central belt to improve access to veterans across Scotland. Stewart McKay, Deputy Head of Operations for Scotland, said: "Our main hub will be co-located with Erskine on Gilmerton Road in Edinburgh and will provide a range of multi-disciplinary interventions to veterans across the East of the country, including intensive treatment and family and peer support. Our Glasgow hub is based in the SCVO office in Sauchiehall Street and is pleased to share the premises with a wide range of third sector organisations; this in turn will support the West of Scotland". Combat Stress also has a team based in Inverness and uses a range of community bases across the country to provide care as near to a person's home as possible.



The 'chill out' area at Combat Stress in Glasgow



Contact Combat Stress:
0800 138 1619 (All and every day)
text 07537 404719
helpline@combatstress.org.uk
<https://combatstress.org.uk>

Veterans Tribe Scotland offers veterans, and their families, creative and wellbeing events and activities. Founder and Coordinator Gerry McGregor tells the story.

“The arts can help keep us well, aid our recovery and support longer lives better lived.” So concluded an all-party group of Westminster MPs, confirming what many know from personal experience: being creative is good for us. Doing arts and crafts, we can become relaxed, focused, happy and unaware of time passing - a wellbeing boosting state psychologists call ‘flow.’

For Gerry McGregor, the idea for Veterans Tribe Scotland grew over many years. “After I left the RAF, I had a serious back injury,” she says. “Immobile, I was driving my family to distraction. Then I took up arts and crafts. It really helped and set me on a creative route which I’ve never left.”

As Gerry recovered, she worked for Armed Forces charities and was involved in organising community events. “Sports were great, but I found creative activities worked better for a lot of the people I supported,” she says. She also knew how vital social contact is for wellbeing having “been very isolated at one time, with a baby, and in a town where I didn’t know anyone.”

Losing a job spurred her to take a risk. “I set up Veterans Tribe Scotland (VTS) with my redundancy money. The idea was to use arts and crafts to enable people in the ex-service community to make friends, be part of something, and, if anxious, to feel less so. Within days, I absolutely knew it was needed. With support from **Walking with the Wounded** I was able to apply for future funding.”

VTS offers online and face-to-face opportunities. “Online, we have a regular book club (six books each year) and monthly photography and model making groups. Model-makers and photographers meet face-to-face between online events, if they can,” says Gerry.

“Outdoors, there’s bushcraft, metal detecting and fishing. Indoors, cookery, pottery, mosaic, wet felting, animation and general craft days. My car is a Tardis, full of craft kit. Someone always says: ‘how did you get all that in your wee car?’”

Gerry has been struck by the ‘buzz’ when everyone is “heads down, busy, but chatting away” while doing crafts. “Where someone is a bit unsure socially, such side-by-side activity works really well,” she says. “People often say; ‘I’m not creative, I can’t do this.’ But there’s no pressure, they can just sit and have a cuppa, though most decide to join-in later. I also hear ‘I never thought I would like that, but I did,’ a lot!”

“Sometimes what happens takes your breath away” says Gerry. “On a taster book-binding course there was such a great atmosphere, with all the guys helping each other. After two hours everyone had a beautiful bound book.”

Gerry has found that doing crafts together can even give struggling couples a boost. “I’ve seen their faces change during a session, from tense and frowning, to smiling.” Most activities can also be intergenerational. “I love seeing how relationships grow where generations craft together. If you’ve got grandkids for the weekend, it’s a great thing to do together.”

To be part of VTS it’s helpful to have access to the internet. “On our website www.veterantribescotland.co.uk you can sign up to be notified about events. If there’s something you fancy, you click a link to say you want to come along. We’re not yet covering all of Scotland, but you don’t have to stick to events in your area. If you don’t have access to the internet, perhaps there someone who can sign-up for you and keep you posted?”

The model of a perfect day out

Former army engineer **Colin Coney** travelled from Ayrshire to VTS's July craft day at the Military Museum in West Lothian. "I've been to quite a few of these events," he says. "It's good to catch-up with guys that I don't see that often as they live in other parts of the country." Over several events Colin has made tealight holders, painted stones, coasters and more. "I find doing crafts very beneficial. It's different; it's not a normal day. You get chatting with the other guys and forget all about your hassles."

As well as going to craft days Colin is part of the VTS online model-making club. "It's good. I've made lots of vehicles, including an F10 Volvo, various trucks, and a small Land rover - an experimental vehicle that had loads of different paints chucked at it! Right now, I'm working on a Challenger 2 Tank."



Colin Coney

Visit www.veterantribescotland.co.uk or call Gerry McGregor on **07817 979 48** to find out more.



Crafting at the Military Museum

The oldest tri-service charity

SSAFA has joined the Unforgotten Forces Partnership. Staff and volunteers explain what SSAFA offers and the difference it makes.

SSAFA is the UK's oldest tri-service support charity. "It's fantastic being part of a charity with such a legacy" says Regional Casework Manager Linda Liddell. "The work the charity does is amazing. It blows me away that mostly it's done by volunteers."

SSAFA can support anyone with a minimum of one day's pay and one day's service with HM Forces. "We also support widows, widowers and dependants, in the same way as for the service person," says Linda. "We can do this even if there's been a marriage breakdown, so long as they haven't remarried or are with another partner."

SSAFA can assist with broken household goods such as cookers and freezers where replacement is unaffordable. "We can also help with utility bills – a big challenge for people," says Linda. "With household adaptations, we'll find out what government money is available first, then try to fill the gap. For example, if you are going through Council to convert a bathroom to a wet room, its grant may only cover 80 percent of the cost. Often, we can source money from service charities to cover the remaining 20 percent."

SSAFA can help solve problems that others walk away from. "Recently there was a lady in an old tenement whose bathroom was just a basin and toilet," says Linda. "She wanted to put in a shower, which was a challenge as the room was long and thin. The Council refused to pay on safety grounds, but we found the funding and tradesmen who were up for the challenge. This helped her be independent, as previously she had to go to family members to use their showers."

No reasonable request is refused. "We've helped getting people abroad to see war graves, or for repatriation of bodies" says Linda. "Often we can help with funerals where the government grant hasn't covered the full cost."

It's not just about money. "We're there to listen, to chat, and to check in with people to make sure they aren't isolated. If someone is struggling with mental health, we can help them access specialist support."

Linda has been with SSAFA through big changes. "SSAFA Glasgow, where I worked, and which is one of the few branches with paid staff, was being used as by people elsewhere who had difficulty reaching their local branch. Our branch volunteers are fantastic, but they can't be as available as paid staff, so we needed a rethink. We've set up a SSAFA Scotland Regional Office as a first point of contact. When you call, we'll take your details, verify your service history, and ask about your circumstances and what you need. Sometimes a caller will have lost their service record, in which case we may be able to help them get a copy for free."

The next stage is that a volunteer case worker gets in touch. "If you need welfare assistance, they will support you through the application process," says Linda. "They do the paperwork to put your case to funders, who can include regimental charities, benevolent funds, Poppyscotland, and civilian charities and trusts."

A challenge for SSAFA is that there are people who need and are entitled to their support who are unaware it's available. "This can be an issue for older people who aren't online. We do promote our services, but we need help to spread the word," says Linda.

On the SSAFA frontline

Walter Gallacher shares his experience of volunteering with a SSAFA Edinburgh and Lothians branch.

“I volunteered as a SSAFA Caseworker a couple of years ago and became branch Chair in March 2021”, says Walter.

As Chair he is responsible for the operational running of the branch. “I make sure we stick with SSAFA’s values, helping in a non-judgemental manner, and within the financial, regulatory, and other guidelines set by our charity. It’s also about having a rigorous process of assessing individual need.”

Needs can be, for example, around physical or mental health, finances, or the home environment. “Sometimes it’s quite complex to assess needs, as beneficiaries get older, and their circumstances get more difficult” says Walter. “We can advise clients to get a welfare benefits check and, if necessary, refer to debt management counselling.”

Caseworkers work with beneficiaries to get quotations for goods and service and make recommendations on the support needed. “It can, for example, be white goods, brown goods, wet rooms, ramps, or other mobility aids. Dignity is important, so we ensure individuals have some choice in the goods they select.”

The next step to find money from various charities to make it happen. “We make sure any work takes place at the time agreed with the client,” says Walter. “If it’s an emergency, such as a client is at risk of eviction, SSAFA will take it in hand and deal with it quickly. We also distribute emergency funding for food and utilities as appropriate.”

Volunteer caseworkers are central to each SSAFA branch. “We recruit, train and support volunteers locally,” says Walter. “We always welcome new volunteers. We’re looking for people with communication and IT skills, an interest in helping other people, and time, as each case will take around 2-3 hours. It’s not essential that volunteers have a background in the armed forces: I don’t, though a lot of people do. What matters more is the ability to listen and empathise, and to be non-judgemental.”



Contact SSAFA

Call. **0141 488 8552** (Scottish Regional Office)

Email. scottishregionaloffice@ssafa.org.uk

www.ssafa.org.uk

Regularly being in nature is positive for physical and mental health. We introduce outdoor opportunities that may be particularly meaningful to veterans.

Grave matters

“In 1917 our founder Fabian Ware set up a mobile Red Cross Unit on the Western Front,” says **Patricia Keppie**, Public Engagement Coordinator at the **Commonwealth War Graves Commission**. “War graves of those who died in battle weren’t recorded or tended, so as soon as it was safe Fabian coordinated work on the battlefields so that everyone would be commemorated.”

Funded by six Member Governments including the UK, the Commission has cemeteries at 23,000 locations worldwide. “In Scotland alone there are 21,000 plus graves of people who died here because of war service,” says Patricia. “Our skilled crafts people maintain the headstones, and we are the biggest employer of gardeners in the world.”

Volunteers complement the professionals. “Our ‘Eyes on, Hands on’ volunteers visit scattered local war graves and report back if they need attention, for instance lettering is no longer legible,” says Patricia. “They can do weeding and cleaning - with water and a soft brush to avoid damage. We also have volunteer tour guides and researchers, and volunteers who do talks and school workshops.”

Volunteers often say they find the cemeteries peaceful and therapeutic. “Some volunteer alone, some with a friend or family member, others with a group,” she says. “Sometimes cadets or school pupils volunteer alongside older people.”

For Patricia, it’s about lives, not death. “Those we care for are people like us, from our communities. Lots of stories have yet to be uncovered, especially World War One.”

Volunteer **Dave Dykes** prepares and leads tours, which “can be a challenge in a cemetery like Perth, a mile long.” For him it’s akin to researching family history. “I use the internet, libraries, and cemeteries. It’s a challenge, and fascinating. I meet people – online and in person – who generously share stories with me.”

After leaving the Navy, Dave became a teacher. “Visiting war graves with school French trips led me to research the 160 names on Perth Academy’s memorial. After retiring I supported pupils on a WW1 centenary history project. By the time that project finished it had become a passion.”

In the cemeteries you can find an Admiral, cook and an apprentice side by side with the same simple headstone. “This ‘equality of commemoration’ was controversial at first, as some had argued certain people should have grand tombs.”

Some stories stand out. “Harold was killed when aircraft carrier HMS Nabob was torpedoed in WW2. A Jewish Canadian, he faced barriers enlisting, but persevered. His friend came from Canada to bury a lapel badge by his headstone in tribute. It’s a highlight to meet people who remember with pride.”

Dave recommends coming on a tour. “It’s not morbid, it’s history, with stories of ordinary people in extraordinary times, some of whom did extraordinary things.” He also recommends volunteering. “It’s my emotional life jacket. That first lock down, this is where I came, sat, and thought. The cemeteries are well-tended and beautiful, and I often chat to the lads who garden when I visit.”

It also has deep personal significance. “My brother was killed serving in Northern Ireland. Remembering these people and sharing their stories has helped me to commemorate him, and to work through things that I had buried for a long time.”

Find out more and contact the Commission: **01628 507200** | www.cwgc.org

Beauty against horror

Army veteran **John**, age 63, can be found at Tollcross Park in Glasgow most weeks, all year round. He's a regular at **Forces of Nature**, a therapeutic gardening project run by charity SACRO for all ex-service men and women. "War is horrible, but here you transition from all that macho caveman stuff to being Percy Thrower," he says. "It's about the beauty of the world as opposed to horror."

John is learning a lot. "All I knew was how to cut the grass and trim the hedge. I get bored quickly, but if I like something I'll give it 100 per cent, and I've really enjoyed this." John and his fellow veterans have planted flowers and trees and grow a variety of fruit and veg, which they also enjoy, most recently pesto made with homegrown basil and garlic. Those who so wish can go for horticultural skills awards.

After a difficult childhood, John enjoyed great friendships and memorable experiences in the Army. "I learned to ski, to parachute - great. In Berlin I guarded Rudolf Hess, and the military train running through Eastern Germany." But some aspects were negative. "In Germany we could buy strong booze cheap. Alcohol was the ruination of many a good soldier, including me. There were a lot of fights in nightclubs between regiments."

He also had some horrific experiences. "I thought I was okay. Then one Guy Fawkes night fireworks outside triggered something." That led to a spiral of worsening mental health and alcohol misuse, ending in a serious incident and arrest. "A specialist diagnosed complex PTSD, telling me I was about the worst case he'd seen," says John.

Forces of Nature is giving a huge boost to John's recovery. "When I get here any depression I might have had seems to lift. All the squaddie banter, where slagging is a way of saying 'I like you', it's great. Mentally I'm not in the dark place I once was." John is also part of Forces of Nature group walking the John Muir Way from Dunbar to Helensburgh in ten-mile stages up to Remembrance Week. "I felt brilliant today after yesterday's walk; energised, though a bit sore."

Forces of Nature Coordinator **Graeme Dalglish** would like the service to reach across Scotland. "We're working with guys in Edinburgh and provided a veteran in Aberdeen with seeds and advice. If anyone wants some gardening support, we're a call away."

Contact Forces of Nature: **07870 854790** (Graeme) | infoforcesofnature@sacro.org.uk



Dave with Harold's grave



A guided tour at Perth cemetery



Graeme (L) and John in the garden at Tollcross Park

Interview: Scottish Veterans Commissioner

Newly appointed Scottish Veterans Commissioner Susie Hamilton shares her thoughts and aspirations for the role.

“I enlisted from school and left the Navy after 17 years. I worked in industry then, for 14 years, with Scottish Veterans Residences. While SVR works with the few who need intensive support, being involved in the Wrens Association has given me broader understanding of the veterans’ community.”

Her priority is to “listen to lots of veterans, from services leavers to those who left long ago,” and to use what she learns to help “ensure that veterans across Scotland can enjoy fulfilling lives.”

Susie also aims to challenge stereotypes. “Veterans can be young, or old, or someone like me – there’s no one type.” Some miss out on support because they don’t realise it is there, or that they are entitled to it. “For instance, I’ve found that ex-service women don’t always consider themselves veterans,” she says.

Susie doesn’t see veterans as a breed apart, “although sometimes their lives are a little more complex” due to their service. “It’s about fair, not special, treatment.” She believes the UK-wide Armed Forces Act 2021 presents an opportunity for ensuring that happens. “Once guidelines around the Act are finalised, I’ll be looking at whether and how statutory bodies are fulfilling their new duties,” she says.

Susie believes there is good practice to build on. “The UK Civil Service now has a guaranteed interview scheme for veterans who meet job specifications. For a veteran who’s never had to write a CV or do a job interview, the disadvantage is taken away. I plan to ask whether and how this is being rolled out in Scotland.”

Housing is another area of disadvantage. “Some Housing Associations give veterans extra priority, but some don’t. I’d like to see this rolled out across the board.”

Susie intends to work with a broad range of partners. “As well as statutory services, I’d like to link with charities as I know directly how much they do for veterans. I want to be approachable, to listen, and to find consensus where I can.”

“There’s a lot of change going on in the veterans’ arena, much of which is built on the work of my fantastic predecessors,” says Susie. “I want to hear from veterans if this is making things better on the ground. And if not, what are the frustration points? I’d also like to hear from people for whom things are going well, so we can identify things we’d like more of.”



Contact Susie:

0131 244 7136 | scottishveteranscommissioner@gov.scot

Scottish Veterans Commissioner
GA South
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ

<https://scottishveteranscommissioner.org>

We are the champions!

Councils, NHS Boards, and other public bodies have signed the Armed Forces Covenant and appointed an Armed Forces and Veterans Champion. We asked two Champions about the role.

The NHS Champion

Jo McBain is the Champion in NHS Highland. Not a veteran, she was nonetheless happy to take on the role as she has family and friends in the military. “Being Champion sits with my job as Director of Allied Health Professionals, which is helpful as I have influence across NHS Highland and am involved in strategic planning,” says Jo.

Advocacy is key to the role. “I can raise individual’s concerns with the service they’ve had issues with. Even where they don’t get the outcome they hope for, there may be something I can do to make life more bearable. I can join dots for people in a system that’s complex, even for those who work in it. I encourage veterans to approach me; to tell me if something we are doing isn’t meeting their needs, and about things we’re doing well that they’d like us to do more of. I can only advocate well if I understand the needs, and it never hurts to ask.”

Each case is also an opportunity to raise awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant. “It’s still quite poorly understood across parts of the workforce, so a priority is to make NHS Highland an ‘Armed Forces informed’ organisation,” says Jo. Her team runs Armed Forces-related training for staff including GP trainees and Occupational Therapists. “My ambition is for everyone in the workforce to have basic awareness, with enhanced training where it’s vital staff are ‘veteran informed’, such as in mental health.”

Most cases Jo deals with involve service personnel or leavers moving in or out of the area, but older veterans are also a focus. “For example, I’ve helped veterans in their early sixties who need treatment quickly to enable them to continue in work. But after the pandemic the challenges are bigger. I might be able to move someone forward on a waiting list, but the wait could still be lengthy.”

Rurality is also a major challenge. “NHS Highland serves 41% of the landmass of Scotland, including 36 islands, with only 5 per cent of the population.” Linking up with communities is therefore essential. “We work with charities including Poppyscotland, Crisis, and Combat Stress, and with Council and DWP Champions. I’d like to engage more with groups such as Men’s Sheds, and make better use for veterans of our Community Link Workers whose job it is to connect individuals with local activities that support health and wellbeing. We’re planning a webpage, the biggest chunk of which will be information on services and advice on how to navigate them.”



The Council Champion

Mark Horsham is Armed Forces and Veterans Champion for South Lanarkshire Council. “I had been an Army mechanic, so on my election in 2017 I asked to do it,” says Mark. It was a role he had to carve out. “Although the council signed the Armed Forces Covenant in 2012 and had previously had a Champion, there was no role description. Alongside the North Lanarkshire Champion I set up a ‘Firm Base’ group to bring together local organisations with an interest in service personnel and veterans. Now 30 organisations, from the Police to charities, attend its meetings, as do I to ensure the Council is part of ongoing dialogue about how best to support the Armed Forces and veterans’ community.”

The other side of Mark’s role is supporting veterans with problems. “I do this not just for my ward, but across the Council area,” he says. “I may support directly, linking veterans with Council and other services. Other times, I advise colleagues.” He runs awareness sessions across the Council to “make everyone aware of what we’ve agreed to in the Covenant, to ensure their knowledge is up to date, and to encourage them to go that extra mile for those who need it most.”

Housing is a key issue. “Few are homeless, but sometimes the home isn’t right,” he says “For a veteran with PTSD for example living in a noisy flat isn’t helpful. Other times it’s about ensuring people with disabilities get the right equipment.”

Mark welcomes the new duties placed on Councils under the Armed Forces Act 2021. “Across the UK some have only paid lip service to the Covenant, instead of honouring the pledge we all signed,” he says. “We’ve been consulted on guidance for Councils around the Act. A key thing will be ensuring the guidance takes account of Scottish devolution.”

Meanwhile Mark aims to develop Council support for local veterans. “We publish advice for those moving into the area,” says Mark. “We guarantee an interview for veterans meeting the criteria for Council jobs, regardless of how long ago they left service. On our website you can find notes of our Firm Base meeting. I’d like to take the Firm Base group on the road and make its work more visible and accessible so that people know help is out there. I’d like to reach more female veterans; 98 per cent of my veterans’ case work is for males, so where are the women?” I’d also like there to be more social groups for veterans in our communities. I enjoy going to these groups and hearing about the experiences of my peers.”



Mark Horsham on Armed Forces Day with South Lanarkshire Council Provost Margaret Cooper

THE KNOWLEDGE

A round up of hot topic information and new opportunities

Autumn boosters of Covid vaccination

A further booster vaccination will be offered to those in Scotland at highest risk of severe COVID-19 disease from September, including to all adults aged 50 years and over. Boosters will be given in community clinics, where possible at the same time as the flu vaccination to those who are eligible.

Vaccinations will be offered first to frontline health and social care workers and those who are most vulnerable to the effects of the virus. Letters will be sent to the first eligible groups from August, with appointments beginning in September. In the meantime, those eligible for a booster need not do anything.

Health Secretary Humza Yousaf said: “The additional booster dose will improve your level of protection significantly and is the best way to protect yourself, your family and of course the NHS when we head into the busy winter months.”

Be cyber secure

Getting online can make life easier in many ways, but also comes with risks. Online scams and cyber threats are becoming increasingly common and sophisticated, but you can protect yourself by knowing what to look out for. The following actions can help improve your online security.

1. Create strong passwords using 3 random words

Passwords help keep our accounts secure online. Three random words (e.g. PaintSquidPorridge3) can be remembered much more easily than complex characters and symbols, but importantly can increase the length of your password making it harder for criminals to crack. Make yours strong, longer, and more memorable by combining 3 random words that you can remember. The dafter the better!

2. Turn on ‘Two-Step Verification’

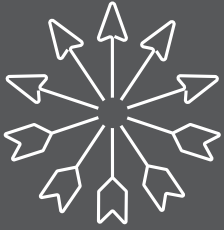
Two step Verification helps protect you with a second layer of security that checks it’s really you logging-in. For example, you provide your username/password as the first step, then you receive a text asking for confirmation.

3. Update your devices

Cyber criminals exploit weaknesses in software and apps to get your information. Installing the latest software updates is a quick and effective way to secure your devices. Think of update reminders as an alarm telling you to act.

Find out more at www.cyberscotland.com/cyber-aware

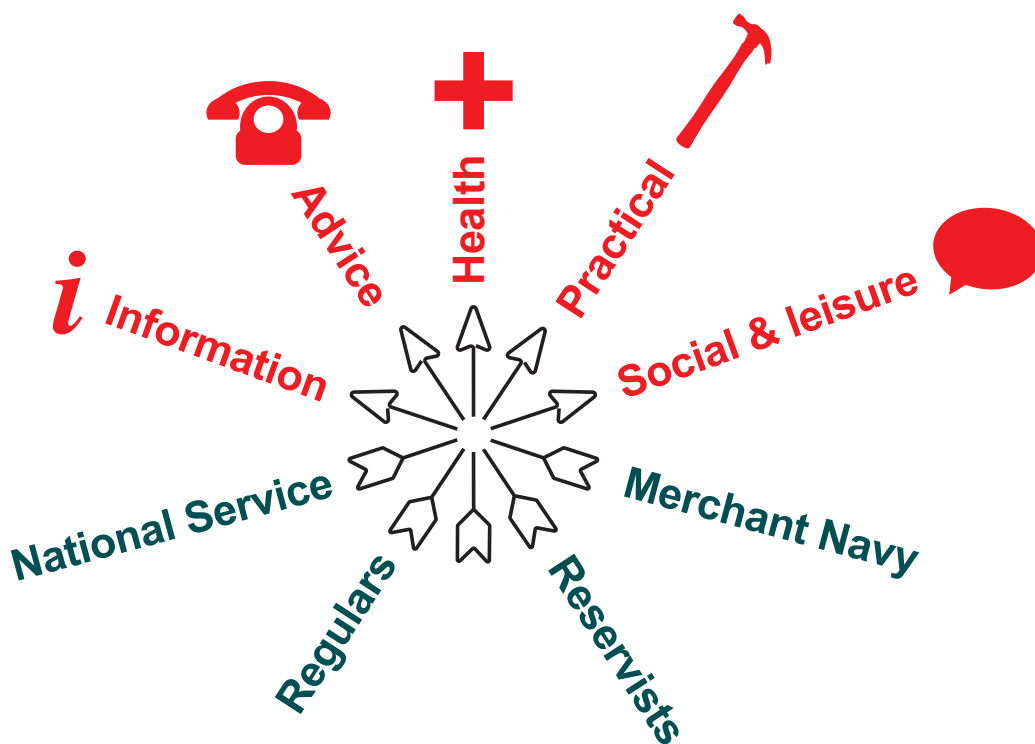




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Supporting Scotland's Older Veterans

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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0800 12 44 222

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

