



# UNFORGOTTEN FORCES

Supporting Scotland's  
Older Veterans

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## MAGAZINE

ISSUE THREE: AUTUMN 2021

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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.

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# Foreword

## Welcome to Unforgotten Forces magazine.

Hello,

Summer is at an end, but with veterans clubs and services now getting back to normal there's lots to look forward to. On 21st September Unforgotten Forces is inviting older members of the ex-service community to a morning event in Aberdeen, followed by lunch. This is an opportunity to have your say on what it means to be part of that community, and on support you would like for the future. You can find out about the event, and charities and individuals there to help you influence decisions affecting your life, on page 6.

Boosting your wellbeing is what Unforgotten Forces is all about, and in this issue, we feature activities that can make a tremendous difference to it. A pet dog can lower stress and loneliness but owning one might feel like too much of a commitment. You can find out about charities that can support you to enjoy canine companionship on page 4.

Volunteering doesn't only help others – research shows it can also give your own happiness a lift. On page 8 you can meet veterans who volunteer and find out about volunteering opportunities with Unforgotten Forces partner charities.

Singing with other people is fun, sociable, and brings health benefits. On page 10 we introduce women who sing with Military Wives Choirs, which are for all women in the service and ex-service communities, not just wives.

Each issue we have the 'The Knowledge', a round up of useful information for older people in the ex-service community. On page 12, you can find out about how Combat Stress and Poppyscotland services are changing, and about support for hearing loss from Hearing Link Scotland.

If you enjoyed this issue, please recommend it to others who you think might be interested. We'd love it if more older members of the ex-service community received free copies of the magazine. We also welcome feedback on what you liked, what can be improved, and on topics you'd like to read about. You'll find out contact details, for both feedback and subscriptions, on the Contents page.

Best wishes

Doug Anthony, Editor



## From phones to gnomes

Army widow Marie MacIver needed some extra help due to frailty and health problems. Emily Clark, Legion Scotland Veterans Community Support Service Coordinator for the North of Scotland, arranged for Social Services to instal a home alarm and buzzer, and for BT to put in a low-cost phone line so it could all work. “I spent hours on the phone with BT getting it sorted,” says Emily. “In the end I persuaded them to effectively waive Marie’s monthly cost for more than a year.” Poppyscotland chipped in to cover the cost of her new phone handset.

Emily also arranged for Fares4Free to take Marie to get her Covid jab and for medical appointments. And she has been matched with a volunteer who will keep in touch and escort her to Legion Scotland’s lunch group in Inverness. “Marie was upset because someone stole her garden gnome – made for her by her husband before he died – so I also arranged for Fares4Free to bring chocolates and flowers to cheer her up.”

Marie says: “The support is a lifesaver. I know, no matter what, I can pick up the phone and get help. I’m looking forward to outings and lunches again as soon as we’re allowed to mix. But in the meantime, I’m so grateful for the visits, phone calls and all the background help I get.”

## Sailing past sight loss

Actor and Royal Navy veteran James Martin, who played fan favourite Eric in the much-loved sitcom *Still Game*, was finding it increasingly difficult to recognise faces and read due to the eye condition age-related macular degeneration (AMD). He had no support, but then, in 2019, he discovered Sight Scotland Veterans. The charity has since provided James with specialist equipment and expert advice that has helped him regain his independence.

“I had never heard of macular degeneration when I was diagnosed,” says James. “I thought there’d be something to cure it, but soon found out that there isn’t currently. I can see all around me but when I try to pinpoint things in the middle of my vision it’s blurred.”

James has been provided with aids including a talking watch and specialist lighting for reading. “I love my cups of coffee, and one of my favourite things is a gadget that vibrates to let me know when the water has reached the top of the mug.”

Sight Scotland Veterans also sourced a Synapptic tablet for James, which features software designed for people with sight loss, and provided digital training at the Linburn Centre in West Lothian – one of the charity’s activity hubs.

James said: “People can feel wary of reaching out for support, but I would recommend any veteran affected by sight loss to get in touch with Sight Scotland Veterans. For me, the benefits have been companionship, that feeling of kindred spirits with the staff, and all the gadgets they’ve been able to provide. It’s really been helpful. I have fond memories of the camaraderie of serving in the Navy and that feeling is there with Sight Scotland Veterans too.”



James Martin

## Gone fishing

Legion Scotland and Fares4Free teamed up to treat RAF veteran Tam Morrison to a much-needed day out. With transport provided by Fares4Free's David Gibson, Tam had a fantastic outing at Loch Goil. Elliot Thomson, Legion Scotland's Veterans Community Support Coordinator for the West of Scotland, arranged lunch, boat hire and the fishing, and came along for the ride. Tam had not been fishing for 50 years, and thoroughly enjoyed ribbing Elliot who was the only one not to catch a fish.

## A Mitie big help

Legion Scotland has been receiving the help of facilities management company Mitie to boost its support for the veterans community. Mitie Operations Supervisor Andrew Lindsey says: "We're signatories of the Armed Forces Covenant and are committed to helping service leavers start and thrive in a facilities management career. So, when asked to support veterans in the community through Legion Scotland, we were delighted." For Andrew, it's personal: "My dad served in the Falklands, and a lot of us in Mitie have a Forces connection, so we love helping out." Often, it's simple jobs like installing handrails, which "my engineers can sort out if they are in the area." Recently there's been a lot of garden clearance, getting gardens to a manageable state for people with health conditions and disabilities. But in some instances, the support has been a lifeline. "One chap got cut off by the snow and his food and heating oil supplies were running out," says Andrew. "We worked with a charity that provides rescue services to get him emergency supplies, by foot over the last mile, and later that day they had a tractor with a snow plough clear his drive so he could get out."



Fishing success: Elliot (L) with Tam (R)



BEFORE



AFTER

A Mitie makeover

**FIND OUT MORE**

**Find out more about the services in our stories**

**Sight Scotland Veterans:** Call 0800 035 6409 or visit <https://sightscotland.org.uk/veterans>

**Legion Scotland Veterans Community Support service:** Call Tommy Douglas: 0131 550 1560

**Fares4Free:** Call 07708 299 399 or visit [www.fares4free.org](http://www.fares4free.org)

# Canine camaraderie

**The era of mounted cavalry may be long gone, but animals continue to play a key role in military life. In 2008 Labrador Sasha, who located 15 bombs and ammunition caches in Afghanistan before being killed with her handler Lance Corporal Kenneth Rowe, was awarded the PDSA Dickin Medal, known as the animals' Victoria Cross.**

After service, animals can help veterans to thrive. Studies have found pet owners are less prone to minor ailments such as headaches, coughs, and colds, are less likely to have a heart attack, and if they do, have a better chance of survival.

But with a great pet comes great responsibility. Feeding a dog costs £400 to £2,000 per year depending on its size. Vet's bills can be steep, so taking out pet insurance is advised. While it won't cover the cost of routine check-ups, vaccinations, or dental treatments, it will save a great deal of expense if a pet becomes ill or has an accident.

The good news is that there's lots of support out there for older pet owners. Charity Give a Dog a Bone supports people aged 60 and older who are on a low income to own a rescue dog. They pay the rehoming fee and provide a monthly payment to help covers costs including pet food and insurance. "We already support veterans," says founder Louise Russell, "and as my dad served and my sister is in the RAF, I'd love more to make use of us."

For Louise, the benefits of dog ownership are huge. "They give you routine and a sense of purpose. Everyone talks to you when you are out with your dog. You get more exercise. And there's the unconditional love – dogs don't judge you, unlike cats!" But what if the dog doesn't suit? "Rescue operations decide if a person is right for a dog and the contract is between them and the owner," says Louise. "We're the enabler." They can however assist if later the owner becomes unable to care for their dog. "Some rescue operations have in the contract that dogs should go back to them," says Louise. "But where needed we can help find a dog a new home."

Not every dog lover will wish, or be able, to own one, so Give a Dog a Bone also has Community Spaces in Glasgow Shawlands, Troon, and Alloa where people can drop in for a free cuppa, a blether, and to "scratch their doggy itch without the responsibility." These are open to all in the community. "It takes confidence to join something new, but seeing a dog gives people courage. Once in, they always come back," says Louise. "Our dogs are trained and supervised, and we give advice on how to approach them."

The Spaces have featured fun activities from yoga to creative writing, currently moved online but expected to restart face to face when safe. There are also group dog walks offering company, exercise, fresh air, and fun. Louise is keen to open Community Spaces in other areas.

Some charities are all about bringing dogs and veterans together. Mick Cairns founded 'A Veterans Best Friend' to train and match rescue dogs to support, and be companions for, veterans with mental health needs. "I was medically discharged after 15 years in the Marines with PTSD and a personality disorder," says Mick. "That day my dog Sam watched, then jumped up and pawed me, which he had never done before." Understanding what dogs can do for people's mental health became his passion. "I did PTSD assistance dog training and volunteered with charity Bravehound. I learned dogs can smell and react to hormones released when we are stressed. I'm much better now, but want to use what I've learned to help others."

Support dogs can encourage veterans who might otherwise self-isolate to get out of the house and exercise, and to alleviate stress such that they feel able to cope in busier places. “If a veteran becomes ‘zoned out’ by memories of trauma, a dog can be taught to lick their hands or face to help them out of that. One told us that his pup wakes him up before his nightmares gets too distressing, and he can’t thank us enough.”

Many veterans’ groups and services appreciate the value of dogs. Maureen lives in a Scottish Veterans Residences house in Edinburgh. “When I was in the army, having a dog didn’t fit into that life,” she says. Later she lived in Spain, and it was there she rescued her pointer, Dixie.

“Whitefoord House has single rooms for single people. Dixie breaks the ice with people here, and before you know it you are in conversations. They always want to speak to her first, which is nice. And the staff are dog lovers, many bringing their dogs to work.” Having Dixie also gives Maureen’s life structure. “She needs to go out and be fed. I really benefit from that.”

## Help to enjoy canine companionship:

### Give a Dog a Bone

Tel **07969 742 858**

Email [hello@giveadogabone.net](mailto:hello@giveadogabone.net)

[www.giveadogabone.net](http://www.giveadogabone.net)

### A Veterans Best Friend

Tel **07721 002757**

Email [info@aveteransbestfriend.co.uk](mailto:info@aveteransbestfriend.co.uk)

[www.aveteransbestfriend.co.uk](http://www.aveteransbestfriend.co.uk)

### Bravehound

Assistance dogs for veterans with PTSD

Tel **0141 739 8940**

Email [hello@bravehound.co.uk](mailto:hello@bravehound.co.uk)

[www.bravehound.co.uk](http://www.bravehound.co.uk)

### Cinnamon Trust

Support for older and terminally ill who find pet care a challenge.

Tel **01736 757 900**

<https://cinnamon.org.uk>

### PDSA

Veterinary support for people on low incomes.

Tel **0800 917 2509**

[www.pdsa.org.uk](http://www.pdsa.org.uk)

### Borrow my doggy

Matches dog walkers with people needing dog walking support

[www.borrowmydoggy.com](http://www.borrowmydoggy.com)



Photo by cottonbro on pexels

# Getting your voice heard

**Many of us can feel excluded from decisions that affect our lives. For older people, and for veterans, there are however specialist organisations and individuals that can help you to have your say and get heard.**

The Scottish Older People's Assembly (SOPA) exists to give a strong voice to older people about their experience of life in Scotland, the challenges they face and concerns they have, and to celebrate the positive contribution they make to society.

SOPA brings older people together at an annual Assembly, parliamentary receptions and 'have your say' events. It campaigns against stereotyping of older people, takes up issues of concern to its members and supports the campaigns of partner organisations. And SOPA has the ear of Government Ministers, parliamentarians, and other important decision-makers by being 'at the table' in influential forums, networks, and groups.

SOPA joined the Unforgotten Forces partnership in 2017, and through that it has developed its focus on enabling older members of the ex-service community to have their voices heard. In 2019 it held a 'Voice of Veterans' event in Bathgate. Royal Navy veteran Jim Houghton said: "It was good to have the opportunity to put our views forward as veterans. The event was very successful and helpful." Findings from the 'Voice of Veterans' event were highlighted in a veterans workshop chaired by Scottish Veterans' Commissioner Charlie Wallace at SOPA's 2019 Assembly.

During the pandemic SOPA has found alternative ways to support older people to have their voices heard. SOPA Coordinator Caroline Clark says: "we've had lockdown film projects, run a survey on experiences of getting healthcare during the pandemic, and held an online event on challenges and solutions for supporting older people to reconnect as COVID restrictions ease."

Caroline encourages older members of the ex-service community to join SOPA, which is free. "You'll find our membership form and loads of resources for campaigning on our website," she says. "And if you're not an internet user, call us and we'll send you a form."

## Contact SOPA:

Email: [info@scotopa.org.uk](mailto:info@scotopa.org.uk) Phone: 07434 867890

Facebook: [scotopa](https://www.facebook.com/scotopa)

Website [www.scotopa.org.uk](http://www.scotopa.org.uk)

Voice of Veterans event, Bathgate



## Belonging and longing

**Tuesday 21st September, Aberdeen**

10.30-12.30hrs, followed by lunch. Free.

An event for you to share what being part of the ex-service community means to you, and to have your say on the support you need to keep well and happy in later life. It is hosted by the Unforgotten Forces partnership, and views gathered will be considered by the 2022 Scottish Older People's Assembly and be presented to decision-makers with power to boost the wellbeing of the older ex-service community. Pre-booking is essential.

For details and booking email [veteransproject@agescotland.org.uk](mailto:veteransproject@agescotland.org.uk) or call the Age Scotland veterans' team on 0333 323 2400.



## Introducing the Scottish Veterans Commissioner

I welcome this opportunity to explain my role and how together we can make a difference for veterans in Scotland.

I have been tasked by the Scottish Government with 'improving outcomes for our veterans and their families'. Of course, I cannot do this alone, so I see my mission as one of leadership, bringing partners together to create the right conditions to enable veterans and their families to flourish in civilian life. I aim to do this by listening to you, individually and collectively; acting as an independent and vocal advocate to drive change; and by providing scrutiny and challenge to policy makers and those providing services to veterans and their families.



Charlie (R) at a Sight Scotland Veterans centre

I do not have any statutory powers and cannot investigate individual cases or complaints. There are others whose role it is to do this, and I can point people in the right direction to the correct advice and support, but I cannot take up cases myself. My only power lies in my experience, independence, and the influence I can bring to bear.

As things are now opening up I am keen to get out and about again and meet some of you face to face. You can contact me by email: [scottishveteranscommissioner@gov.scot](mailto:scottishveteranscommissioner@gov.scot) and tell me what you are doing, what challenges you are facing and what issues are important to you. You can also write to me: Scottish Veterans Commissioners Office, GA South, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ.

I am always keen to hear directly from veterans as your voices inform my work and help me establish a fuller picture and provide evidence as I aim to use my position to advise, encourage and persuade Government Ministers and officials.

**Charlie Wallace**, Scottish Veterans Commissioner

## Poppy power



### **Poppyscotland Public Affairs and Campaigns Manager Ross Thomson explains the charity's campaign on improving the Armed Forces Bill currently before the UK Parliament.**

Poppyscotland is campaigning for the Bill to go further so that it will fully deliver on the promise of the Armed Forces Covenant to the Armed Forces community. The Bill largely applies only to local government, and some education and health bodies. We believe that national governments and the devolved administrations should be subject to the same legal standard on the Covenant that it is seeking to apply to councils. In our experience, many of the policy areas in which members of the Armed Forces community experience difficulty are the responsibility of UK or Scottish Governments.

The Bill is limited to housing, education and healthcare. We know from our own experience that there are other topics of high importance to the Armed Forces community that would benefit from the legal protection of a due regard duty. These include employment, pensions, compensation, social care, criminal justice, and immigration. Therefore, we are campaigning to widen the scope of the Bill.

As part of the campaign we are actively encouraging members of the public to support us by using **#HonourtheCovenant** on social media and emailing their local MP, which you can do very easily through the **Poppyscotland** website: [www.poppyscotland.org.uk/about-us/campaigns-advocacy-policy/campaigns-policy---what-we-do](http://www.poppyscotland.org.uk/about-us/campaigns-advocacy-policy/campaigns-policy---what-we-do).

# Volunteering is for veterans

Scientists are catching on to what many have discovered for themselves – that giving time to help others boosts your own wellbeing. Last year researchers at the University of East Anglia reviewed thousands of studies and found that volunteering boosts life satisfaction and happiness and decrease symptoms of depression. Older people, the unemployed and those with chronic ill health and low wellbeing gain most, and volunteering can help with major life changes such as retirement and bereavement.

Geoff (R) with James



Within the veterans' community there's a strong tradition of mutual aid. **Geoff**, a volunteer with the Legion Scotland Veterans Community Support Service, exemplifies this. The Service offers supportive, reliable relationships through volunteers like Geoff to veterans who would otherwise be socially isolated.

"My wife died four years ago," says Geoff. "I was down and thought 'I have to do something to get me out and that gives me something to look forward to'." Having served in Engineers, volunteering with the ex-service community seemed like a natural step.

Two days each week Geoff visits different veterans, sometimes for a chat but other times to accompany them on outings like shopping.

"They all have a good tale to tell. One, a former Royal Scot, spent two years of WW2 as a POW. Another, James, cleared underwater mines during the war. We both served in Malta, so I bring photos of the island on each visit. He has dementia, but it brings memories back and we've had some great chats about places we've discovered there."

Geoff has heard incredible life stories. "One chap, an amateur astronomer, could calculate the earth's gravity as accurately as NASA with a jam jar, copper wire and a magnet!" The oldest veteran Geoff visits is age 101. "He flew a fighter during the battle of Britain."

Geoff can't recommend volunteering more highly. "It's helped me immensely and given me an appetite to do more. If you are at a loose end with no work commitments, it's really easy and enjoyable." Age isn't a barrier. "I turn 80 on my next birthday. I said to myself, 'don't' stop, this is what keeps you going."

For some, volunteering overlaps with belonging to a veterans' group. Naval veteran Paul is a regular at Erskine Reid Macewen Centre (ERMAC). "When I first came I didn't have much confidence. I've been helped through that, learned how to help myself, and now am helping others. It's been a great process. It's taught me humility, to share, and to give back."

Paul shares his digital photography skills with his fellow ERMAC members. "I show them how to use and get the best of whatever camera they have, and techniques for landscapes and composition." Doing an HND in photography helped Paul with his own mental health challenges, something that he wanted to pass on. "Basically, it's about getting them into the fresh air, which for those with mental health problems can really help take their minds of things. And when the weather isn't good, I show them how to use software to edit their pictures."

Paul recommends "simply being involved. If you end up volunteering that's great, but just being there is the major part."

As Covid restrictions ease exciting volunteering opportunities are opening across Unforgotten Forces partner charities. James Whyte, Volunteer Development Manager at Sight Scotland Veterans, says: “Our activity centres in Paisley and near Edinburgh have re-opened, and we hope to restart volunteering there soon. Roles include art tuition, helping in our woodwork room, gardening, and driving members to and from the centres. We also have a volunteer helping our Rehabilitation Team.”

Despite lockdown Sight Scotland Veterans’ volunteers have not been idle. “They’ve provided telephone friendship. It’s great for reaching more isolated members, and volunteers can do it from home. We’ve used group phone calls for things like quizzes and theme nights and are looking for volunteers to facilitate these.”

Covid has also spurred other Unforgotten Forces partners to develop remote volunteering opportunities. At the RAF Association volunteers provide one-to-one, personalised conversation, vital friendship and support via telephone and digital initiatives to those in the RAF family who need it. And Age Scotland is recruiting volunteers to support ‘Comradeship Circles’ which provide older members of the ex-service community with regular group camaraderie by phone.

Back at Sight Scotland Veterans, James is seeking volunteers to develop stories, poems, recipes, guided walks, and other audio clips that members can listen to on computer devices. “If you have skills in journalism, sound engineering, poetry or music, we’d love to hear from you,” he says.

James also wants to encourage volunteering by members, for members. “Our members don’t see themselves as passive recipients of help. During lockdown they’ve looked out for each other, and where someone helping you is authentic and genuinely understands, it’s incredibly powerful.”



ERMAC had its own Olympics with events including bowls, kurling, javelin, archery and iPad dressage. The oldest competitor was age 102 and there was a spouses and carers day.

## GIVE TIME TO SUPPORT OLDER VETERANS



**Sight Scotland Veterans:** Call 0800 035 6409 / <https://sightscotland.org.uk/veterans>

**Legion Scotland Veterans Community Support service:** Tommy Douglas: 0131 550 1560

**Erskine:** 0141 814 4689 / [www.erskine.org.uk](http://www.erskine.org.uk)

**Age Scotland Comradeship Circles:** Email [veteransproject@agescotland.org.uk](mailto:veteransproject@agescotland.org.uk) or call Caroline McDonald 0333 323 2400.

**RAF Association:** Email [friend@rafa.org.uk](mailto:friend@rafa.org.uk) or call 0800 018 2361

# Who dares sings

Age isn't a barrier - anyone can join

**The Armed Forces has a great tradition of music, from majestic brass bands to spoon playing. Civilian life can disconnect service men and women from that tradition, but it's never too late to rediscover the power of music making, with no instrument or talent required.**

Singing is good for us. It improves breathing and posture and reduces muscle tension. It releases the body's natural painkillers and mood boosting chemicals. There's some evidence singing might even strengthen the immune system. Learning new songs boosts the brain, and old favourites can stir enjoyable memories.

Singing with others is better still. Joining a choir or singing group offers fun and friendship. It can also bring a sense of belonging and pride in the group and its achievements.

With 72 choirs and nearly 2,000 members in British military bases across the UK and overseas, the **Military Wives Choirs** is a charity that brings all women in the military community closer together and enhances their wellbeing through singing. The first choir began just over a decade ago with women at Chivenor military base. They asked TV choirmaster Gareth Malone for help, which led to a TV show, performances including the Royal Albert Hall, chart success and recently a movie.

Military Wives Choirs is a tri-service organisation and open to wives of serving personnel, those currently serving, veterans, mothers, sisters and daughters, and others with a military connection. There are currently eight Military Wives Choirs in Scotland: Condor, Edinburgh, Inverness, Kinloss, Leuchars, Lossiemouth, Rosyth and West of Scotland. These offer weekly rehearsals in a safe space for women in the military community to come together to sing, share and support.

Former Army nurse Elaine sings with the Rosyth choir. "Nursing in the army is wonderful. I saw the world - and a lot of Salisbury plain! Inevitably, I married a medic." In her seven years with the choir, she has appeared on BBC's The One Show and recorded two albums. Today, she's a trustee as well as a singing member. "It's like going back to your services days," says Elaine. "The same camaraderie and banter. You feel you belong. It's like a big family. It really lifts your mood. It's lovely."

Sandra, who is married to a veteran, sings with the Lossiemouth Choir. "It gives you a feeling of belonging to something – a group of people you know you can rely on, and who share stories and experiences with you. The support network is a totally wonderful thing to have, but there's no pressure either. I so wish the choir had been there when I was newly married and experiencing military life and all that it brought. I was at home on my own with a small child. I was lost. It was terrifying."

Marie joined her choir four years ago when a friend invited her to a Christmas singing taster. "I was out my comfort zone, but I'd been missing that military connection since I'd left the Navy." Three weeks later she found herself on a cold bus with 25 other ladies on the way to perform a flash-mob event. "I wish I'd been able to make that connection earlier in my career," says Marie. "It's provided a family for me – more so than ever during the pandemic."

There have been so many highlights for the women. "Recording our albums in the Usher Hall was amazing," says Elaine. Marie had the opportunity to sing a solo from a show tune she loved as a child at a concert in Glasgow – "a minute of exhilarating joy!" For Sandra, "performing in a care home was as exhilarating and fun" as a concert. "Watching the residents while we sang, and talking to them afterward, brought joy and a feeling of being able to do something special."



West of Scotland MW Choir, Dream Captures photography

None find it easy to choose a favourite song. “It’s like asking me to choose a favourite child!” says Sandra. But all love singing poignant songs that relate to their shared experience. “I love songs that make you feel brave, and amazing after you sing them,” says Marie. “Then at the end you think - we did that together and created something quite beautiful.” “We sing ‘Brave’ and some of the lyrics are about being brave,” says Sandra. “Being a military wife or partner, you have to be brave, and having singing sisters around you definitely helps.”

During the pandemic rehearsals have moved online, but they are now hopeful of singing together again soon. “I’m looking forward to a real hug,” says Marie. “You always get a hug at choir - and singing together is like a big hug.” Four babies were born to members of Sandra’s choir in the last year and she’s looking forward to ‘baby snuggles.’ “When new mums come, we’re able to give them a short break, by snuggling their babies, which is invaluable to them. It’s been a real struggle. Military life goes on through the pandemic and missing that choir family is huge.

Military Wives Choirs is inviting more women from the Armed Forces community to join. “You don’t need to be able to sing or read music, although a love of cake helps.” says Elaine. “Just come along and the rest falls into place. Age isn’t a barrier – anyone can join.” There’s no obligation on choir members to take part in performances.

## GET IN TOUCH



### Contact the Military Wives Choirs

Tel: 02074639407

Email: [joinus@militarywiveschoirs.org](mailto:joinus@militarywiveschoirs.org)

Facebook: [@militarywiveschoirs](https://www.facebook.com/militarywiveschoirs)

[www.militarywiveschoirs.org](http://www.militarywiveschoirs.org)

militarywives  
Choirs®

# THE KNOWLEDGE

## Changes in services for veterans

During the Covid-19 pandemic some charities have been reflecting on how best to provide support for veterans in the future and now plan to reshape their services.



Following a UK-wide review with its parent charity the Royal British Legion, **Poppyscotland** will remove its high street Welfare Centres in Inverness and Kilmarnock, with staff who were based in these offices moving to permanent remote working. Interim Chief Executive Mark Collins says: "The move to reduce our office space has been developed in response to the changing needs of the Armed Forces community and the changing environment in which we are operating. By introducing a more flexible delivery model and making changes to our office set-up, Poppyscotland and the Royal British Legion will be able to provide more personalised care to a greater number of people and significantly reduce response times for those in need."

**Contact Poppyscotland: 0131 550 1557 / [gethelp@poppyscotland.org.uk](mailto:gethelp@poppyscotland.org.uk)**

After 35 years at Hollybush House, **Combat Stress** has decided to move out of the treatment centre in Ayr to new premises in both Edinburgh and Glasgow (details to be confirmed). Those veterans currently being supported by Combat Stress will not have their treatment impacted by the move of premises, and new referrals will continue to be welcomed into our services.

Jeff Harrison, Interim Chief Executive Officer at Combat Stress, said: "We will be very sad to leave Hollybush House after 35 years. It is Combat Stress' aim to help as many veterans as possible with military trauma and we can best achieve this by relocating to Edinburgh and Glasgow. Not only will it be easier for veterans to access our services because of the better transport links, but by modernising our services veterans will benefit from our specialist, cutting-edge support."

**Contact Combat Stress: 0800 138 1619** (All and every day)

Text: **07537 404719** / Email: [helpline@combatstress.org.uk](mailto:helpline@combatstress.org.uk)



## Never too old to go online

If you would like to use new technology and the internet but don't know where to start, help is at hand. Volunteers at charity **AbilityNet** can provide free support to older and disabled veterans anywhere in the UK. They are all disclosure-checked and can help with all sorts of IT (information technology) challenges, from setting up new equipment and resolving technical issues to showing you how to stay connected to family, and use online services. Call the **AbilityNet helpline** on **0800 048 7642** (freephone and minicom) during office hours or email [enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk).

If cost is a barrier to you using the internet, **Poppyscotland** includes digital access grants in the financial support it can offer to veterans. To find out more you can call their **Get Help line** on **0131 550 1557** or email [GetHelp@poppyscotland.org.uk](mailto:GetHelp@poppyscotland.org.uk).

If you served in the Royal Navy or Royal Marines there's an exciting new initiative open to you. The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC) is working in partnership with the Royal Naval Association (RNA) to bring online connectivity into the homes of older veterans. The **Sparko TV kit** is a small box which connects to a TV and comes with a webcam and simple remote control. This enables people to connect with family, friends and community using simple digital technology.



The Sparko tool does not interrupt or interfere with TV programmes; the camera is only activated if a person is on a video call or a live/class activity and will show a small light when in operation. A privacy slider for the camera is included to cover it when it is not in use to ensure peace of mind. Essentially, Sparko is a simplified version of the internet which can be accessed from the comfort of your sofa/armchair, through your TV.

For an application form call Lynda Pearson, the **RNA Welfare Programme Manager**, on **07591 829416**, or email [lynda@royalnavalassoc.com](mailto:lynda@royalnavalassoc.com).

## Help with hearing

Nicholas Orpin, Services Delivery Manager at **Hearing Link Scotland**, explains what the charity can offer older members of the ex-service community.



In recent times the difficulties of living with hearing loss have been brought to the fore with issues around communication, isolation, access to services and community life a daily struggle for many.

At Hearing Link Services, we know the value of lived experiences and everything we do is designed or delivered by someone with personal or professional experience of hearing loss.

We support over 1,000 people every year with personalised solutions for managing their hearing. Help starts with a simple question: "Can I get captions on my phone?" "I've got ringing in my ears" "What's the best phone to use?" "Are lipreading classes recommended?" "No-one understands my situation" "I've lost my independence".

If any of these sounds familiar, our services can help. Depending on the nature of your enquiry, you could benefit from one or more of the following:

**Helpdesk:** Personalised responses on managing hearing loss for individuals, their family members, businesses, and professionals. [helpdesk@hearinglink.org](mailto:helpdesk@hearinglink.org) / [www.hearinglink.org/helpdesk](http://www.hearinglink.org/helpdesk).

**Hearing Hub sessions:** One to one sessions with volunteers or staff members lasting up to 45 mins to cover your enquiry face-to-face. Bookable via the **Helpdesk**.

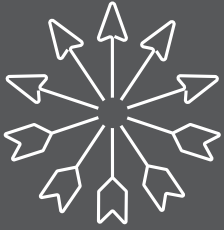
**LinkUp Online:** A group of up to eight people meeting online to explore issues relating to hearing loss. Find out more at [www.hearinglink.org/linkups](http://www.hearinglink.org/linkups).

**Website:** An excellent resource site with tips, advice, and solutions for hearing loss. [www.hearinglink.org](http://www.hearinglink.org)

If you want to find out more about our services and how they can help you can also contact me directly: Mobile **07917 170 122** / Landline **01844 340 714** / [nicholas.orpin@hearingdogs.org.uk](mailto:nicholas.orpin@hearingdogs.org.uk).

## New support for dementia carers

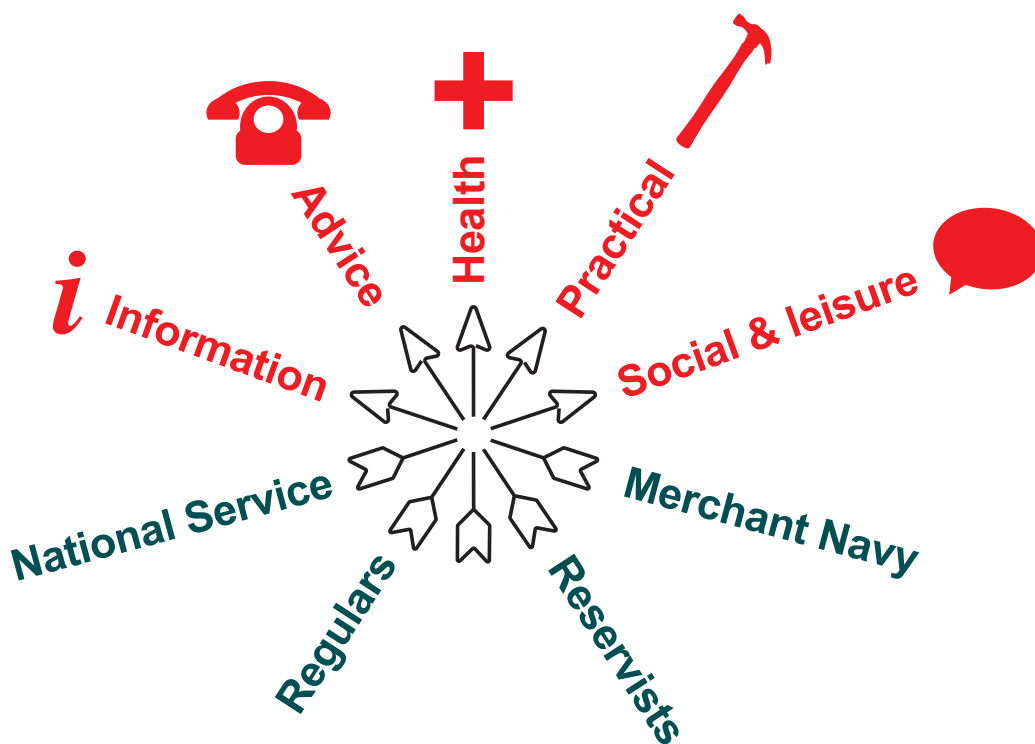
Poppyscotland has been working with their partners at the Royal British Legion to provide veterans in Scotland with a telephone service to support carers of those living with dementia. Anyone in the Armed Forces community in need of this specialist support can call the **Admiral Nurse Team** on **0808 802 8080** or email [ANsupport@britishlegion.org.uk](mailto:ANsupport@britishlegion.org.uk).



# 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.



@UFForces



@UnforgottenForces

[www.unforgottenforces.scot](http://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)

