



**UNFORGOTTEN
FORCES**

Supporting Scotland's
Older Veterans



On Manoeuvres with the **Female Veterans Transformation Programme**

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Veterans
Pilgrimage

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Change Mental
Health, Angus

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Gambling
Harm

MAGAZINE

ISSUE TWELVE: AUTUMN 2025

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The Unforgotten Forces magazine is for older ex-Armed Forces men and women 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

We are happy to bring you the latest edition of the Unforgotten Forces magazine, reminding us of the resilience and camaraderie that runs through Scotland's veteran community. With this magazine, we share your stories, highlight the services here for you that keep us all connected.

We are also excited to share that we now run regular Unforgotten Forces Awareness Training sessions, jointly led by Laila Henke and myself. These are designed to help partner organisations, community groups, and anyone working with older veterans to better understand the needs and experiences of those who have served. You can check our website for the latest schedule and booking details.

Your feedback in our recent readers' survey told us you would like to see more coverage of issues affecting female veterans - so we have made the Female Veterans Transformation Programme our headline feature. We speak with programme lead Liza Jarvis and talk with the women who took part in their most recent photoshoot campaign.

Also in this issue, we look back at our May Unforgotten Forces Gathering in Stirling, which brought together partners, veterans, and supporters for a day of learning, sharing, and connection. We hear from SSAFA in marking 140 years of standing alongside Armed Forces families in Scotland, and we step into the Highlands with the Veterans Community Support Service to relive their 2024 pilgrimage - a four-day journey of camaraderie. We also sit down with Professor Alan Gow from Heriot-Watt University to talk about the importance of brain health, and with Jamie Higgins from the RCA Trust to explore gambling-related harm in the veterans' community. In Angus, a new service is opening to support unpaid carers for current or former members of the UK Armed Forces, and lastly, our Knowledge section rounds up practical advice, useful contacts, and opportunities that could make a difference to you or someone you know.

Thank you for being part of the Unforgotten Forces.

Frank Gribben,
Unforgotten Forces co-ordinator



Female Veterans Transformation Programme

I went behind the scenes with the Female Veterans Transformation Programme (FVTP), a three-year UK-wide programme - jointly funded by the AFCFT, NHS England and the OVA - that is producing an online toolkit to help providers transform how their services can support female veterans. The programme aims to change the ways that providers operate, so that female veterans can access the right support, at the right time, in the right way for them.

FVTP toured the UK in July and August 2025 - visiting Wales, Scotland, and England - to take portraits of women who have served, as part of their female recognition and celebration campaign.

This project captures and celebrates the experiences of female veterans through powerful images and storytelling - making female veterans visible and recognised in a showcase of their service.

I had the pleasure of joining the team in Edinburgh at the Poppyscotland office to do a little behind-the-scenes coverage for the magazine. My aim was simple: to speak to the women taking part and capture the energy and atmosphere of the day - not just through photos, but through the small moments that happen off camera too.

The portraits were led by a brilliant team from Agora Photography: Ian McCarthy, a former Navy medic who served 19 years, and Lucy Arscott, who is passionate about empowering women, particularly in sport. For both, this was a heartfelt project, and it showed in how they worked with such care and warmth. Stacey Denyer, FVTP's Communications and Engagement Officer, was on hand to organise and manage the day, ensuring all the photoshoots ran smoothly and doing a fantastic job of bringing everyone together.

The sun was shining, which felt lucky for Edinburgh, and everyone arrived dressed in whatever made them feel most like themselves, following the motto of the day: **authentically you**. There were smiles, hugs, and lots of laughter. The energy in the room was vibrant and full of connection.

Everyone there understood the importance of what this programme represents. These weren't just photos - they were statements. Every woman who stepped in front of the camera was saying: **she served in the armed forces; she is many things; she is a veteran**.

It was a joy to witness - and I'm so grateful to have been part of the day.

Laila Henke

For more information on the FVTP, its activities and toolkit visit www.fvtp.org.uk



Reflections on the programme

Portraits by @agoraphotography_sw



Fiona Deacon

"I worked for Poppyscotland as a case officer," Fiona says. As a female veteran herself, Fiona believes visibility matters.

"It's important to highlight how many women are actually veterans."



Emma Watson-Mack

Emma is the head of Veterans Scotland, the umbrella organisation representing the interests of all veteran charities across the country.

Her motivation for supporting the project is deeply personal: *"I am a female veteran myself, and I'm passionate about any progress we can make on issues affecting women who've served".*



Jane Thomson

"I'm quite close with a number of other veteran charities, and we often refer veterans to each other. It's all about making sure they get the right support at the right time."

As a female veteran, Jane believes it's crucial that women who have served feel recognised.

"I think it's important to amplify that there are female veterans. Sometimes, women don't even identify as being a veteran. This is an excellent project, and I'm pleased to be part of it. I really do believe that female veteran voices need to be heard."



Joyce Quin

"I've been disconnected from everything. When I left the military, I didn't feel the need to reach out to veterans' charities. But I am more connected now and I'm helping through fundraising for Erskine and PoppyScotland. I want to support the charities in that way - so they receive more publicity and more funding."

When asked why she chose to get involved with the programme, Joyce was clear. *"Because I understand what we're trying to do. I agree there's a big gap. No one thinks of women as veterans. That's why outreach is so important - for the next generations. So they get better support than I ever had."*



Fresh from a successful photoshoot for the campaign, we caught up with the FVTP's lead, **Liza Jarvis**, who shared her thoughts on why it matters and how it's helping to change perceptions of who a veteran is.

Laila

The campaign you've been working on is called the **Female Veterans Recognition and Celebration Campaign**. For many women, being photographed as a veteran might be a first. What does this moment represent for you?

Liza

It's an opportunity to showcase the diversity of female veterans – all ages, backgrounds, and ethnicities, across every branch and role. We want people to realise they might be standing next to a female veteran at any time, and to make it natural to ask, "Have you ever served?" For the women themselves, it's recognition. Many have never been photographed as veterans before. It was also great to see all the conversations happening at the side, with women sharing experiences, swapping details of services that helped them, and building community.

Laila

What would you say to an older woman who served but never saw herself reflected in the veteran community?

Liza

You are a veteran. Even if you served just one day in His or Her Majesty's service, you served your country. Many older women left because of the marriage ban, the pregnancy ban, or the LGBT ban, often abruptly and without the smooth transition to civilian life others had. That can leave people feeling unsupported and unseen. This campaign is about changing that – about saying, "You are seen. You did serve." And I really challenge women to stop saying "I only" or "I just" when talking about their service. Whether you served seven years, never saw combat, or were in a non-frontline role – it all matters. You are entitled, you are allowed, you are completely well withing your rights to get the support you need.

Laila

Why is it important to see women represented in veteran campaigns and events?

Liza

Firstly, to remind the public that women served – it still surprises some. Secondly, so that services recognise women's unique needs and make sure they are met. And thirdly, to celebrate the contributions women have made to our Armed Forces. You don't have to call yourself a veteran – you might prefer ex-servicewoman or ex-military – but you are still entitled to the support available.

Laila

Some male veterans might ask why the focus is on women. What would you want them to understand?

Liza

Allyship matters. These women served alongside you, shoulder to shoulder, passing the same tests, doing the same jobs. Male veterans can help challenge misconceptions, advocate for female peers, and elevate their stories. Again, it's an allyship, supporting, advocating and challenging on their behalf; you don't have to be a female veteran for this campaign – men have a massive role to play in this too. Just as women can be allies to male veterans.

Laila

From speaking to the women involved, what's stayed with you most?

Liza

The change in visibility. When we started two years ago, few people asked women if they'd served. Now, more are asking – and that simple question can open up support, recognition and community. I feel proud that we're even a small part of making that happen.

Looking ahead – training and education

In the final year of the programme, launching in November, the focus will shift to training and education. Liza's team will work face-to-face and online with organisations and services to help them use the campaign's toolkit and resources. They'll run learning lunches, virtual sessions, and on-site workshops, ensuring that the recognition and celebration of female veterans continues long after the project's planned end in 2026. Find out more here www.fvtp.org.uk.

Being an Ally

Empathise · Advocate · Stand Up



What is an Ally?

An ally is someone who champions inclusion and underrepresented groups while not being a member of the group they are defending. Whilst this is predominantly aimed at male veterans supporting female veterans, it can be applied to any marginalised community. Could this be you?

Who can be an Ally?

Anyone. Men, women, veterans, civilians. Even within the same group, like women supporting other women, allyship matters.



There's no fixed formula,
but here are 10 real ways to show up:

1

Listen and Believe

Take women's experiences seriously. Don't dismiss or try to fix – just be present and empathetic.



2

Challenge Sexism

Call out disrespectful jokes or behaviour. Don't shame – educate, especially in private spaces like WhatsApp groups.

3

Amplify Voices

Make space for women to speak. Back their ideas. Share their campaigns.

4

Support Leadership

Encourage women's involvement in leadership, events, and boards. Don't just invite; genuinely value their voice.

5

Understand the Differences

Female veterans face distinct issues; health, trauma, invisibility. Learn about them without expecting women to teach you.

6

Mentor and Sponsor

Offer support with opportunities, not a rescue. Help them see they belong.

7

Modernise Traditions

Challenge outdated norms. Use inclusive language and respect women's service and medals.

8

Foster Safe Spaces

Help make all veteran spaces welcoming – socials, support groups, and events.

9

Check Yourself

Ask: Am I making space or taking it? Allyship is ongoing and reflective.



10

Support All Women

Recognise added challenges for veteran women who are ethnically diverse, part of the LGBTQ+ community, disabled, or even a mix of all three.

Remember

Women can (and should) be allies to other women from marginalised communities!

To find out more visit www.fvtp.org.uk



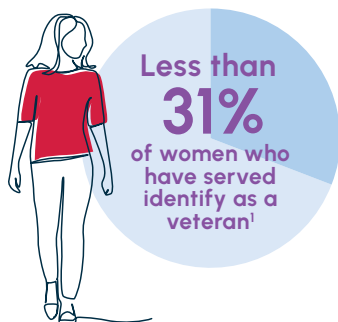
A key outcome of the FVTP is its well-designed, freely accessible toolkit open to all organisations. These include the **Evidence Review**, **Statement of Need**, **Communication checklist**, **Person-Centred Approach Guide**, and **Allyship Infographic**. These materials are available for download on the FVTP website www.fvtp.org.uk/publications.

Statement of Need

What the evidence tells us are the needs of female veterans

IDENTITY

Women often do not identify with the term 'veteran' and face specific, **complex and multi-layered issues as a result of their service.**



WHAT DO FEMALE VETERANS NEED?

- Recognition of the specific needs of female veterans
- Empowerment for women to define their military service in their own terms
- Services should inquire about military service inclusively, rather than using singular terms like "veteran"
- Special attention to the impact of Services Bans (marriage, pregnancy, and gay bans)
- Provision of support for those negatively affected, especially LGBTQ+ individuals

DISTRUST AND MORAL INJURY

Women often feel **betrayed and let down** by the Military as they did not respond to their needs, complaints and requests for help and support.

WHAT DO FEMALE VETERANS NEED?

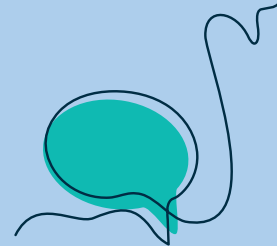
Recognition that this may affect interaction or lack thereof with services.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

Women often don't access veteran facing services as they are seen to be **male dominated and not able to meet their needs.**

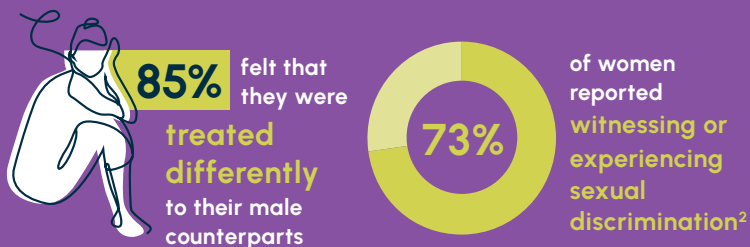
WHAT DO FEMALE VETERANS NEED?

- Women need to feel welcome, equal and able to access veteran support services
- Services should be personalised based on the individual's needs and what matters most to that person
- Professionals need to have greater awareness, understanding of the specific needs of women and respond in a way that makes a difference to them



BULLYING, DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT AND SEXUALLY INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOURS INCLUDING ASSAULT & RAPE

A significant percentage of women have faced or witnessed one or more of these issues during service.



WHAT DO FEMALE VETERANS NEED?

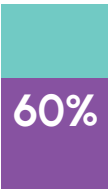
- The widespread and insidious impact of this issue needs to be acknowledged and accepted across the sector so women feel seen and heard and therefore supported in a way that reduces shame and stigma
- Where appropriate and needed, services should be female only, delivered by women



**Female
Veterans**

TRANSFORMATION
PROGRAMME

TRANSITION, EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCE



of women feel they had received little support or preparation for life as a civilian⁴

44%

of women report[ing] being unemployed for long periods of time⁵



WHAT DO FEMALE VETERANS NEED?

Women need better and more targeted support during transition to find appropriate and sustainable employment taking into account caring responsibilities.

Resulting in:

- Fewer financial struggles
- Less impact on mental health due to loss of identity
- Less likely to get involved in criminal activity

AREAS OF LITTLE EVIDENCE

There are many areas that still are largely under researched and therefore no practical action is being taken to improve the situation.

WHAT DO FEMALE VETERANS NEED?

More research and data capture is needed to better understand specific issues for female veterans such as the criminal justice system, race and faith, care services, loneliness, digital poverty and accessibility and Reservists.



PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

'Women in the British Army have been found to be seven times more likely than men to suffer from musculoskeletal injuries.....they are ten times more likely than men to suffer from hip and pelvic stress fractures³

Women are often left with long term impact on their physical and mental health as a result of service.

WHAT DO FEMALE VETERANS NEED?

- Women's specific health needs as veterans need recognising and professionals to have a better understanding of the potential causes
- Women need to feel confident to declare their military service and be supported into specific Armed Forces pathways where appropriate and wanted

⁴ Lauren Godier-McBard, Nicola Gillin and Matt Fossey, *We Also Served: The Health and Wellbeing of Female Veterans in the UK* (Chelmsford: Anglia Ruskin University, 2021), 104.
⁵ Godier-McBard, Gillin and Fossey, *We Also Served*, 30.
⁶ Paula Edwards and Tony Wright, *No Man's Land*, (Dudley: Salute Her UK, 2019), 5.

³ Edwards and Wright, *No Man's Land*, 16.

⁵ Edwards and Wright, *No Man's Land*, 18.

⁶ Christina Dodds and Matthew Kiernan, "Hidden Veterans: A Review of the Literature on Women Veterans in Contemporary Society," *Illness Crisis and Loss* 27, no. 4 (2019): 2.

To find out more visit www.fvtp.org.uk

VCSS pilgrimage to the Highlands

Tuesday 15th - Friday 18th October 2024

Following a successful application to the Veterans Foundation, and after months of planning by Legion Scotland's Veterans Community Support Service Office, we were ready to start the first Pilgrimage since 2021.

We set off on **Tuesday 15th Oct 2024** to begin a 4-day excursion into the heart of the beautiful Highlands of Scotland.

The day of departure was finally here, and the veterans started to arrive at New Haig House. We all got on our very smart coach, supplied by Prentice Westwood, and met our driver for the next four days, **Gavin**. It was off to the Kelpies to see the wonderful sculptures of the Clydesdale Horses and a coffee of course. We had some more veterans to pick up at Stirling, including **Stuart Aitken**, Legion Scotland's VCSS co-ordinator for Scotland North, then it was off to Tyndrum for lunch. We then headed off to our first overnight stop, at scenic Fort William, but not before stopping at the Glencoe Visitor Centre to take in the wonderful views. Once we were all settled in the Ben Nevis Hotel, it was time for dinner and a catch up on our first day's travels.

Wednesday 16th October was a busy day, so it was up early for a bit of P.T. then breakfast and onto the bus for 0930. That was the plan, anyway, but someone decided to have a lie in, no names no pack drills. It was early and the bus was quiet, but it soon woke up when I said we were going to Ben Nevis Distillery for a few drams, followed by sandwiches, tea and coffee with Mrs Susan Macinnes from our Fort William Branch. After a wonderful tour, it was down to the best part the whisky tasting - which went down a treat. Next up on the itinerary was, in my view, the best part of our pilgrimage. So, it was back onto the coach and a short trip along to the Ben Nevis Visitor Centre. We all jumped aboard the Nevis Range Gondolas: an absolutely amazing experience, all 650m to the top. Everyone was amazed. It helped that we had fantastic weather to provide extraordinary views. Once everybody got their photos, it was into the café for lunch, then back down to the coach.

As we were heading to Inverness, we stopped at the Spean Bridge Commando Memorial, where we laid crosses in the remembrance garden and reflected on all the brave souls. Back on the bus it was very quiet, so time to get the chocolate box out. As we headed along the side of Loch Ness looking for Nessie, we all joined in the dreaded Bus Quiz: 20 questions about historic Scotland. I must admit, some of the answers were very strange. The winner was none other than Mr Eddie Maley. As we headed to our hotel in Inverness, our driver, Gavin, provided a running commentary on all the wonderful places of interest to visit. Another day of this fantastic pilgrimage completed.

Thursday 17th October was another wonderful day. The weather was fantastic, sun shining, so it was off to Fort George to be hosted by 3Scots (better known as the Black Watch), who made us very welcome with tea and toast in the Sgt's. Mess. This gave our veterans a chance to speak to the senior ranks about how things have changed since they served. After some time looking around the Fort, we headed to Culloden Visitor Centre, where we had lunch and then a chance to find out what really happened at the battle of Culloden on 16 April 1746. Our tour guide was excellent, providing so many interesting facts about the battle. By this time everyone was showing signs of tiredness, so we headed back to Inverness to the Royal Highland Hotel for the last time, since we would be heading home to Edinburgh the next day.



Friday 18th Oct 2024, breakfast done, it was time for a final photo on the stairs of the Royal Highland Hotel, until we noticed one person missing. As I said at the beginning of the adventure, someone always sleeps in, and they did not disappoint us again. As we headed home, we stopped at Ruthven Barracks for a historic brief by Stuart Aitken. As the pilgrimage grow closer to the end, it was one final stop in Pitlochry for lunch and an opportunity to wish Gavin our driver a happy birthday, with a chorus of Happy Birthday and, of course, a Birthday cake. It was then time for our veterans to go their separate ways, taking away new friendships and wonderful memories.

Tony Hooman.....OUT.

Tommy Douglas led this pilgrimage and stepped into retirement in June 2025. We thank him for his dedication to the Royal British Legion Scotland and to Unforgotten Forces since its inception in 2017. He truly embodies the spirit of "Service, not Self".



caption?

In Angus, a new veteran service from Change Mental Health opened a few months ago.



Sandra Young introduced the service, outlining what it offers and who can benefit.

“Our new Angus Veterans (& Serving Personnel) Carers Support service is providing early intervention and preventative support to carers, helping to break down barriers and ensure their needs are recognised and met.

“This project is open to anyone aged 18 and over who provides unpaid care for a former or current member of the UK Armed Forces. The service will focus on the unique challenges carers may face — including the transition from military to civilian life, and the complex physical and mental health needs that may arise as a result of service.

“Through our assessment process, our Carer Support Worker will work with each carer to identify the areas where support is most needed. We will provide tailored information, advice, guidance and advocacy to help carers feel empowered, supported and able to maintain their own wellbeing while caring for a loved one.”

We caught up with two people at the heart of the new mental health support service for veteran carers. **Ian Smile**, a veteran himself, leading the outreach and support for the Angus service; and **Eddie Scott**, who also served in the Armed Forces, now supporting carers across Tayside. They shared with us their experiences of transitioning back to civilian life, the challenges veteran carers face, and why asking for help might be the most important step you can take.

Laila What was it like adjusting to civilian life?

Ian

It took time to get past the mindset of ‘I’m just on leave.’ I missed the banter and the structure. I ended up working in the prison service and moved into drug and alcohol work. That led to more training and eventually into community roles.

Eddie

It was tough. I had no idea how to access housing, benefits or healthcare. I wasn’t prepared, and the way I was treated made me feel like a nobody. I eventually found work and then became a carer for my second wife, which led me into care work.

Laila How do you think does being a veteran influence the support you give now?

Ian

I understand the mindset, the values, and the challenges of the military experience. That helps me connect with carers and explain why a veteran might act a certain way, especially around mental health.

Eddie

I’ve been through it. I look back at my experience and can explain things in a way veterans understand and explain how the system works, how long it may take.

Laila Great point. And what are some of the common challenges you see veteran carers facing?

Ian

Isolation, limited awareness of services, and often financial stress. Many carers don’t prioritise their own wellbeing - they put themselves last.

Eddie

Navigating civilian systems is a huge challenge. It's not clear, it's not face-to-face, and you often get spoken to in a way that adds to your stress and frustration. That lack of structure is hard for veterans.

Laila

Could you tell me what exactly this new service offers?

Ian

It's about early intervention and prevention. We help break down barriers to accessing health and social care, act as advocates, and help carers develop the confidence to advocate for themselves. Self-care is a key focus.

Laila

And what happens when someone first reaches out for support?

Ian

We'll contact them by phone or email to chat about the service and see if it's right for them. If so, we'll go through an assessment together and identify the key challenges to focus on first.

Laila

What would you say to a veteran or carer who's unsure about getting in touch?

Ian

Just reach out. If the service is not for you, I can signpost you to something that is. It's better to ask than to struggle alone.

Eddie

What harm can it do? It might be the best step you take. You could even be pointed to something else that fits better.

Laila

And what advice would you give to a veteran who is now in a caring role?

Ian

Like in the Forces, things are easier when you've got a team around you to support you to achieve a common goal.

Eddie

Ask questions, keep notes, and build contacts with services like advocacy, welfare rights, or mental health. Be confident - it helps build trust with the person you're caring for.

OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT

Opportunities for carers to connect with others through the service are being developed as peer support groups, shaped around what carers themselves need and want.

For advice and support about the service, please call **0808 8010 515**, email advice@changemh.org or visit www.changemh.org.



Eddie Scott

Veterans inspire free rail travel for people with vision impairment

A campaign led by **Sight Scotland** and **Sight Scotland Veterans** has won a major victory for people with vision impairment. From April 2025, a new Scotland-wide pilot scheme has given free rail travel to companions of blind and partially sighted passengers.

Launched in April, the year-long pilot means anyone with an Eye Plus One Scottish National Entitlement Card can travel with a companion at no extra cost. This will help reduce isolation, improve wellbeing and give people with vision impairment greater freedom to travel.

The breakthrough follows the **Fair Rail Campaign**, sparked when veterans with sight loss told the charities about the growing cost of train travel and the patchwork of support across the country. Their concerns were taken to the Scottish Parliament, debated by MSPs and included in the government's Fair Fares Review.

Working closely with ScotRail and Transport Scotland, Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans have turned those voices into action, delivering a national policy that makes rail travel more affordable and accessible.

Joe Tottenham, a 92-year-old army veteran supported by Sight Scotland Veterans, said: *"I am so proud to be part of the Fair Rail Campaign. Knowing that wherever I go in Scotland my companion can travel with me for free will change my life. As a blind person, having someone to help me on and off the train is vital. I would be lost without them."*



USE THE SCHEME

Please get out and use the pilot scheme – the more people who use it, the more likely it will become permanent.

Visit Visibility Scotland's website for guidance on how to get the card that allows companions of people with sight loss to travel for free on the train:

www.visibilityscotland.org.uk/knowledge/national-entitlement-card-guide

Spring 2025 Gathering

Eighty delegates joined us in Stirling for our spring Unforgotten Forces Gathering in May. The day began with a minute's silence to mark VE Day - an opportunity to pause together and remember - before we moved into a programme full of learning, discussion, and connection.

Opening the morning, Chris Ashworth spoke about the role of the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) and the work it does in Scotland. He outlined the **Veterans Strategy**, explaining how it shapes priorities for the years ahead, and finished by introducing **VALOUR** – a £50 million UK-wide programme announced just days before our gathering. Delegates were among the first to hear about this new initiative and what it could mean for veterans' support.

Our workshops brought both energy and insight to the day. Debra Salem's ***There's More to Singing*** charmed and surprised many; what started with a little hesitation soon became an uplifting session of shared voices and laughter, leaving delegates feeling energised. Sarah White from the Fife Alcohol Support Service, joined by ADAPT Co-ordinator Dougie Ovenstone, led an in-depth discussion on **substance use in our communities**, exploring culturally sensitive insights into veterans' drinking patterns, harm-reduction strategies, and the support available across Scotland. From the Female Veterans Transformation Programme (FVTP), Liza Jarvis gave an interactive workshop - ***Women Also Served: Recognising the Needs and Contributions of Female Veterans*** - sharing how the programme was built, its delivery plan, and the resources it has produced. You can read more about FVTP in our headline feature.

Closing the day, Dr. Lynne Taylor from the Scottish Government spoke about the **Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathway**, set to launch in 2026. Her presentation provided a comprehensive update on progress and the steps ahead to strengthen mental health support for veterans in Scotland.

It was a day that combined networking and practical knowledge - reminding us why these gatherings matter and why we look forward to them so much. We're delighted to confirm that our next gathering will be held in the same venue on **30th of October 2025**. Keep an eye on our website for details and to book your place – we would love to see you there.



Debra Salem



Dougie Ovenstone



Liza Jarvis

Archaeology for veterans' wellbeing

At Wessex Archaeology, we understand the positive impact engaging with archaeology and heritage can have on wellbeing.

Bringing together leading minds and practitioners in the sector, we are one of the largest archaeological and heritage organisations in the UK, and we're also an educational charity. We deliver community projects that are tailored and targeted to meet the needs of communities they serve.

Our work on **Operation Nightingale** (www.wessexarch.co.uk/our-work/operation-nightingale), the MoD's initiative to use the archaeology on their land to aid the physical and mental recovery of service personnel injured in the line of duty, has inspired us to explore ways to extend this work and reach more veterans.

For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic when organising in-person events and courses became a challenge, we developed a project allowing veterans to come together online to learn about naval heritage through digital surveys of X-craft midget submarines (Aberlady X-Craft project | Wessex Archaeology). Many of the participants had never done anything like this before, considering history to be the realm of academics. However, one of the many joys of archaeology is the way it crosses over with and draws on many different skillsets. The practical skills that veterans already had from their service meant they were well-equipped to take on the project and develop their own research paths and investigate the past themselves.

Over a wide range of projects our specialists have provided skills training in survey, excavation, research, project design, 3D modelling, creative writing and art, meaning that participants are able to pursue and explore their chosen direction freely depending on their interests. We also seek to develop links between participants and other local and national groups so that they can continue to develop their skills beyond the end of a project. One participant in the X-Craft project, who left school at 16 with only a few qualifications to join the Royal Navy was inspired to research biographies of submarine crews and write a short report, the first he had written for 35 years. Others built models of submarines and were shown how digital 3D modelling works in archaeology, while others joined our marine geophysics team in looking at subsea surveys of wrecks.



Photos: Harvey Mills

Looking to the future, we are now welcoming participants to a new, free community archaeology project for military veterans investigating exploring a 1500 year old cemetery near St Andrews. We'll be working alongside Breaking Ground Heritage and University of Dundee's human remains specialists to give participants an introduction to geophysical survey, metal detecting and archaeological excavation over 3-4 days at this fascinating site.

This project has been specifically designed for military veterans recovering from physical injuries and/or mental ill health, creating space for them to learn new things alongside other veterans and help develop new skills and confidence.

Participants will learn about how archaeologists detect features underground before any excavation, the process and skill of metal detecting, how archaeological excavations record and understand burials and what the scientific study of human bone can tell us about past populations.

An introductory session will provide those wishing to take part with more information about what can be discovered through osteological research before the on-site work begins. If time allows, it will also look at the use of facial reconstruction and other digital techniques.

GET INVOLVED



We look forward to welcoming participants onto the project. If you or someone you know would like to take part, booking is essential and can be done by contacting the project coordinator, **Ben Saunders** at b.saunders@wessexarch.co.uk



Lost Village Of Imber: Operation Nightingale

Gambling harm in the veteran community

Jamie Higgins from RCA Trust gave a great session on gambling-related harm at our Autumn Gathering last year. We caught up with him to find out more.

You're not the only one – and it's nothing to be ashamed of.

Jamie Higgins

Laila

Hello Jamie, can you tell us a little bit about your background and how you came into your current role at RCA Trust?

Jamie

I served 18 years in the Army: Two Scots. Did a few tours - three in Iraq, two in Afghanistan. When I came out, I had my own struggles, like many do. I started working with kids in care, then this job came up. I didn't know much about gambling as an addiction then - but once I got stuck in, I saw just how serious it can be. It's the same as drugs or alcohol, but often not recognised as such.

Laila

And what makes veterans more vulnerable to gambling harm than others?

Jamie

Veterans are about eight times more likely to suffer gambling harms than civilians. It's the risk-taking mindset - you get used to that in service life. Also, there's boredom after leaving, a lack of purpose. Some folks are trying to recreate the highs, or escape trauma. And for the lads who've had big medical discharges or pension payouts, they sometimes see gambling as a way to make more money fast. But it rarely ends well.

Laila

Just out of curiosity, does it affect mostly men?

Jamie

Mostly, yes. But more and more women are getting caught up too, especially with online bingo. It's advertised like a fun social thing - coffee and chat - but it can become just as harmful.

Laila

And what were the key messages from your workshop at the Unforgotten Forces Gathering that you would like readers to know?

Jamie

That gambling is a real addiction. It changes how the brain works - it's not about lacking willpower. We wanted people to understand that, be aware, especially those working on the frontline with veterans. There's help out there, and we want to reduce the stigma. People can be ashamed, but it's not their fault. The industry's designed to keep you hooked.

Laila

What signs should people look out for?

Jamie

Secrecy with finances, getting edgy about their phone, racing to the door to grab post, or just never seeming to have any money left after payday. Borrowing more than usual. Not all of that points to gambling, but it's worth asking.

Laila

Can you tell us what kind of help is available?

Jamie

RCA Trust covers all of Scotland as part of the Armed Forces Gambling Support Network. We offer totally confidential, client-led support – face-to-face or online. No waiting lists. We also support affected family members. The programme lasts 8–12 weeks, but if someone needs more, they won't be turned away. And there's the 24/7 National Gambling Helpline too.

Laila Are there any success stories you'd like to share?

Jamie Yes, early on in the job, I met a veteran who'd lost everything - his lump sum payout, his confidence. Just having someone to talk to helped. He started treatment the following week. Now, he's three months free from gambling. That's massive. That's why I do this.

Laila What advice would you give to families who think their loved one might be affected by gambling?

Jamie Ask the question. We use something called the "rule out" question - just bring it up gently. But don't give them money. I know it's hard, but lending cash only delays the crash. It is better to help them get proper support.

Laila And if an older veteran reading this is struggling?

Jamie You're not the only one. There's nothing to be embarrassed about. Reach out - to the Samaritans if you're in crisis or call us at RCA Trust. We'll get you into support within 72 hours. This isn't about being daft with money - it's addiction. And there is help.

ORGANISATIONS OFFERING SUPPORT

RCA Trust
0141 887 0880
info@rcatrust.org.uk

Samaritans
116 123
jo@samaritans.org

**National
Gambling Hotline**
0808 8020 133

Armed Forces Gambling Support Network: Battling the Odds

Led by RCA Trust, this is a free, essential support programme for serving personal, veterans, and associated support organisations. Its mission covers three core pillars:

- Awareness via the Bet You Can Help training, enhancing knowledge of gambling-related harms.
- Reducing stigma, fostering understanding and encouraging help-seeking.
- Increasing support, driving early intervention for those at risk or already experiencing gambling harm.

With individuals in the Armed Forces up to eight times more likely to suffer gambling harm, this programme is a timely effort to safeguard both mental and physical health. Contact Jamie Higgins at jhiggins@rcatrust.org.uk for more information.



Keeping your brain sharp as you age

Professor Alan Gow from Heriot-Watt University was another speaker at our Autumn Gathering. We asked him more about building brain health.

Small changes make a big difference over time.

Alan Gow

Laila Hi Alan, what sparked your interest in brain health?

Alan

It began when I was finishing my undergraduate degree. My supervisor had started a study on ageing and thinking skills, and I joined in during its second phase. That's when I really got interested in how lifestyle affects brain health - what people can do more of, or less of, to stay sharp as they age.

Laila

At the Unforgotten Forces Gathering last year, what did you want veterans to take away from your workshop?

Alan

I hoped to show that thinking skills aren't fixed - they can change, and we have some control over that. The groups and charities at the Gathering do amazing work already, and I wanted to add brain health into that mix. As it can be about day-to-day choices and community support too.

Laila

You mentioned a report that listed 14 factors that can support brain health. Which ones should older veterans pay attention to?

Alan

Things like staying socially connected, protecting your head from injury, reducing alcohol and stopping smoking, staying physically active, and managing other health conditions like diabetes. Each one matters, but together they really add up. It's not about getting every single one right - it's about small changes across as many as you are able.

Laila

What stood out from your "What Keeps You Sharp" survey?

Alan

Over 3,000 people answered, and most were optimistic about brain health, which was a lovely surprise. But fewer people felt confident about what they should actually do. And many said they'd wait until something went wrong before making changes. That's something we want to shift - be proactive, not reactive.

Laila

And why are social connection and learning so important?

Alan

Being around others helps in lots of ways - access to support, better mood, and just feeling valued. Learning something new can directly challenge your thinking skills, keeping them active. Plus, it often leads to social opportunities. They're linked, really - use it or lose it, as we say.



Professor Alan Gow

Laila

So, what would you say to an older veteran who's worried about memory loss?

Alan

First, some changes in memory are normal with age. If those changes are causing difficulties day-to-day though, it's always worth seeking advice. If you're worried, talk to someone - your GP, charities like Age Scotland and Brain Health Scotland. And remember: it's never too late. Even small changes - taking a walk, joining a club, trying a new hobby - can help. There's no one-size-fits-all, but there's always something positive you can do.

Laila

Thanks so much, Alan. That's really helpful — and hopeful.

Alan

That's the idea. Small, manageable steps.
Build the life that helps your brain stay healthy.

STEPS TO A HEALTHIER BRAIN



DO NOT SMOKE

If you smoke, quitting is one of the best things you can do for your brain health.



PROTECT YOUR HEAD

Wear a helmet during sports or when riding a bike.



STAY SHARP

Keep challenging your brain throughout your life and stay socially connected.



LOOK AFTER YOUR HEART

Keep physically active, maintain a healthy weight, and try to limit alcohol to under 14 units per week.



TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEARING AND VISION

Get your eyes and ears tested regularly, and wear a hearing aid if you've been given one.



MANAGE UNDERLYING CONDITIONS

Take steps to prevent or manage high blood pressure, high cholesterol and type 2 diabetes.

Adapted from The Lancet standing commission on dementia prevention, intervention and care, 2024.

Actions on lower steps are linked to a greater proportion of dementia cases.

**ALZHEIMER'S
RESEARCH UK** **FOR A
CURE**

Registered charity numbers - 1077089 & SC042474

SSAFA celebrates 140 years

Supporting the Armed Forces community so they never battle alone

SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity, was founded in 1885, after *The Times* published a letter from Major – later Colonel Sir – James Gildea, asking the public to support the wives, widows and children of soldiers and sailors who were killed, injured or rendered incapacitated through service to Queen and Country. This was the foundation stone of what became SSAFA.

140 years on, SSAFA stands with the Armed Forces family in Scotland. Across the military, serving personnel, veterans and their families can access practical and emotional support, all tailored to individual needs.

One of the people SSAFA has helped is 102-year-old Glaswegian **Harold Fenwick**. He served in the Second World War, a war that killed his beloved brother. For over 80 years, he has asked why he got out of France alive and why his brother will forever occupy a corner of it.

Harold's fate could have been so different. For on 6 June 1944, D-Day, Harold joined more than 60,000 British troops who stormed the beaches of Normandy. Moving across France, Harold was hit with a mortar shell and suffered extensive injuries, ending his time on the front line.

For Harold, Churchill's declaration of Victory in Europe marked the start of the rest of his life, spent alongside his wife and children.

SSAFA knows that it is because of people like Harold that we have the freedoms we do today. People now, and those in generations to come, will forever be indebted to men like Harold.

Harold is now a widower living in Cyprus, and SSAFA has had the privilege of supporting Harold for more than ten years, making sure he has everything he needs to live the fullest life possible.

Most of his friends have now passed away, and with advancing age, life can become tough.

SSAFA caseworker Robbie visits Harold regularly, not only swapping military tales but also offering practical support. Robbie secured funds for Harold to have a live-in carer so he can see out his final years in his own home with the dignity he deserves.

SSAFA also helped with new hearing aids, assistance with bills and, most importantly to Harold, a mobility scooter. Now, on good days, Harold can travel a mile up the road on his scooter to enjoy a drink with his friend.

Ryan MacDonald, Regional Manager for Casework and Community Engagement, Scotland Region at SSAFA, commented: *"Hearing about the sacrifices that our Service Personnel and their families have made over the years, like those of Harold and his younger brother, serves as a reminder of how privileged we are to support our Armed Forces Community in Scotland. At SSAFA, we are determined to ensure that no member of our Armed Forces community battles alone".*

For more information about SSAFA, and to access support, visit ssafa.org.uk/Scotland



THE KNOWLEDGE

A round up of hot topic information and new opportunities

The Covenant – to be fully binding on Government

Currently, the Armed Forces Covenant's legal duty applies to public bodies like local councils and NHS providers and covers just housing, healthcare, and education. The government itself is excluded from this legal duty. However, the UK government recently announced its intention to change this, so that the same duty will apply to all UK Government departments and Devolved Governments – across fourteen vital policy areas, including social care, employment, personal taxation, welfare benefits and more. It is expected that the revised Bill will be introduced to the UK Parliament early in 2026.

LGBT Financial Recognition Scheme

The LGBT Financial Recognition Scheme remains open for applications and payments received will not be counted as income when applying for means-tested benefits. If you or someone you know was impacted by the gay ban and have not applied yet, now is a good time to do so. Help is available via **Fighting with Pride** (www.fightingwithpride.org.uk) who will support you through the application process.

Read our **Support for Older LGBT+ Veterans in Scotland** Guide, available at agescotland.org.uk. You can contact the government at LGBT-FRSCHEME@mod.gov.uk or visit www.gov.uk for more information on the scheme.

Admiral nurses support for veterans and their families

Dementia can be especially challenging for veterans and their carers, but Admiral Nurses are here to help. Run jointly by Dementia UK and Poppyscotland, they offer specialist, confidential support, by phone or in-home visits, including emotional and practical guidance for both the person with dementia and their loved ones.

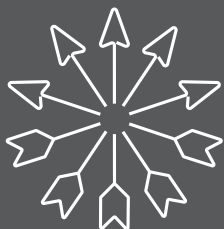
Pension age winter heating payment

For those of State Pension age living in Scotland, the Pension Age Winter Heating Payment has replaced the Winter Fuel Payment. This benefit provides a one-off payment per household during the winter months. It is automatically paid by Social Security Scotland and is designed to match or exceed what pensioners elsewhere in the UK receive. Eligibility and amounts have been aligned to support those most in need with their heating costs this winter.

Claim your Forces Pension

Did you know that every year preserved Armed Forces pensions go unclaimed? A report from the MOD in 2024 showed that almost 15,000 pensions were unclaimed. These benefits are not paid automatically – they must be applied for. Check out the Forces Pensions Society for signposts for eligible veterans to claim their pension benefits:

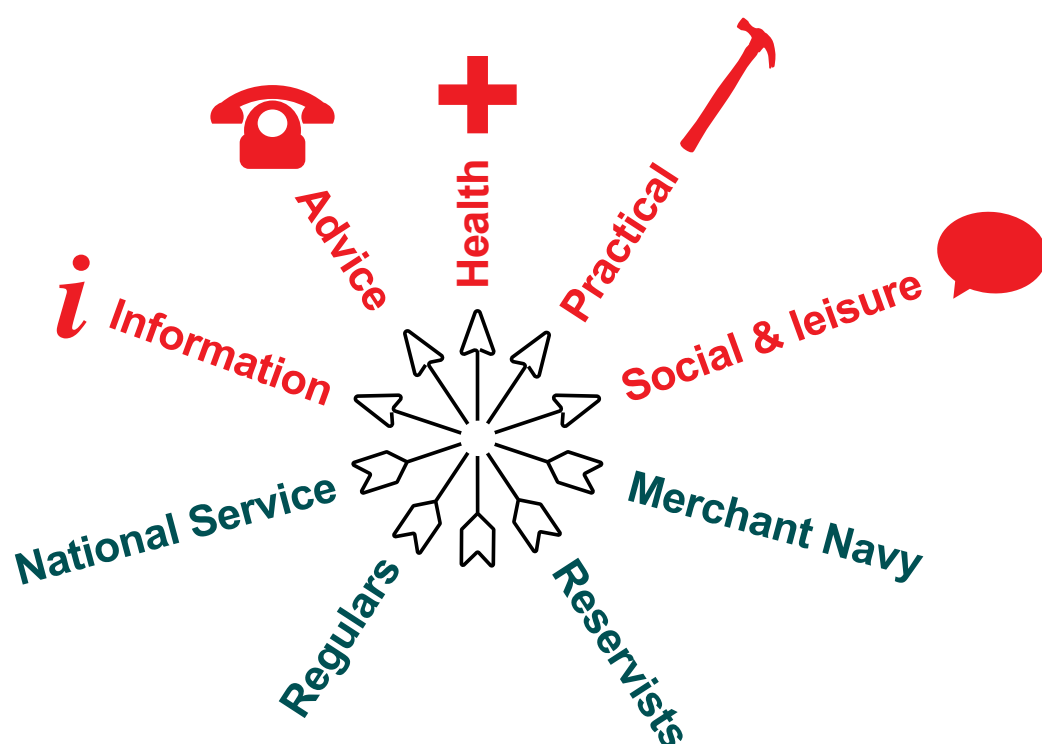
www.forcespensionsociety.org



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

0800 12 44 222

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

