

Veterans Newsletter NI



Issue #7

October 2026

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Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner, David Johnstone alongside Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons MLA, promoting the newly established Veterans Support Line NI.

The Veterans Support Line is Live!

Last November, the Northern Ireland Assembly took an important and welcome step when it debated and passed a motion reaffirming the principle that the Armed Forces community and their families should face no disadvantage in accessing public services as a result of their service.

For the Department for Communities, this commitment has particular significance. The Department's remit touches almost every aspect of people's everyday lives, delivering a wide range of policies, programmes and services and providing vital support to citizens, often at the times when they need it most.

Veterans and their families have given much through service, and Communities Minister Gordon Lyons MLA, has been clear in his commitment to ensuring that this service and sacrifice does not create a disadvantage when accessing services and support for which they are eligible.

The Department continues to work with colleagues across government and representatives of the Armed Forces community to identify opportunities to strengthen support, improve access to services and address potential areas of disadvantage. The Minister also remains committed to ensuring that, where relevant, new schemes and initiatives developed by the Department are considered through the lens of the particular needs and circumstances of veterans and their families.

Eligible veterans can, for example, benefit from the recently announced home heating oil support scheme, alongside the wider range of support available to eligible households across Northern Ireland.

A dedicated support line for Northern Ireland

An important step forward was taken on 26 May 2026 with the launch of Veterans Support Line NI, the first dedicated government support line of its kind in Northern Ireland. (More on page 3)



Ministry
of Defence

Veterans Services

Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland

Veterans Services provides
support to Service Leavers,
Veterans, Families and the
Bereaved.

Contact us



Leaving the
Armed Forces, or
facing challenges
after service? We
can help you
access the right
support.

- Welfare support – advice and practical assistance
- Medical support – service-related physiotherapy and psychological therapy
- Financial support – benevolence and hardship assistance
- Advocacy and signposting to further help
- Pensions and compensation support for Armed Forces schemes

Search 'Veterans Services' on GOV.UK to find out more

Contact Veterans Services:

Mainland UK: 0808 1914 218
Northern Ireland: 07387 050 564
Overseas: +44 1253 866 043

Email: DBSAFVS-VS-NI-ROI@mod.gov.uk

Coleraine: 07570964330
Enniskillen: 07387050505

Hollywood: 07387050603
Portadown: 07387050640

A Life well Lived

It would be remiss of us not to acknowledge the remarkable life of REME veteran Norman Irwin, who sadly passed away this month (September) at the age of 107.

Born in 1918, Norman was known as Northern Ireland's oldest living person, but his long life was notable for so much more than his age. During the Second World War, he served in eight countries and played a vital role in helping to protect the Suez Canal from German attacks.

Norman's commitment to service did not end with his military career. In recognition of his extensive voluntary service, Norman was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) in 2025, receiving his medal from Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, Princess Anne.

Norman's extraordinary life was defined by stamina, commitment, dedication and service. From serving his country during one of its most difficult periods to supporting his community for decades afterwards, he leaves behind a remarkable legacy.



The service provides a dedicated telephone and text entry point, helping to make it as open and accessible as possible to veterans seeking advice, information or support.

When a veteran contacts the Support Line, they can receive a free and confidential needs assessment, modelled on the Department's established Make the Call service. Rather than expecting an individual to navigate different services themselves, the assessment works with the veteran to understand their circumstances and identify potential eligibility for benefits, support and other services.

Right: Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons MLA launches the Veterans Support Line NI alongside then Minister for Veterans & People, Louise Sandher-Jones MP (Now Minister of Armed Forces).

Below: NI Veterans Commissioner records a short Podcast with Minister Lyons MLA



Considerable work has gone into ensuring that the service recognises the particular circumstances and barriers that some members of the veteran community may experience. The model was developed through close engagement with veterans and representative organisations, whose experience and insight helped shape the service and ensure attention was paid to the details that matter to those using it.

Departmental officials have also worked closely with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to establish a seamless handover where a housing-related enquiry is received through the Support Line. More widely, a collaborative approach with relevant organisations allows for a supported or "soft" handover where additional specialist assistance is needed, helping to avoid veterans having to navigate services alone or repeatedly explain their circumstances.



Building confidence in the service



A central priority in developing Veterans Support Line NI has been ensuring that those who contact it can have confidence in both the people and the processes behind the service. Staff have undertaken a significant programme of veteran-specific training, informed by engagement with representative organisations, to develop their understanding of the experiences and circumstances that can accompany military service and transition to civilian life. Support Line staff have also received an enhanced level of security clearance, reflecting the importance placed on confidentiality and trust.

The aim is to provide a high-quality, confidential and trauma-informed model of support, one that listens, understands individual circumstances and, where appropriate, connects veterans and their families with the services that can help. Ultimately, the success of the Support Line will be measured not simply in the number of calls it receives, but in the difference those conversations can make.

Each call answered is an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to veterans and the wider Armed Forces community. Behind every call is an individual or a family, and the opportunity to make a meaningful difference to their lives.

Veterans Support Line NI represents an important practical step in making support more accessible and ensuring that those who have served know where they can turn.

The Department for Communities continues to listen to and work alongside the veteran and Armed Forces community, representative organisations and partners across government to strengthen that support and help ensure that no one is disadvantaged because of their service.

The Thiepval Wood Project

A Garden of Remembrance, Healing and Hope

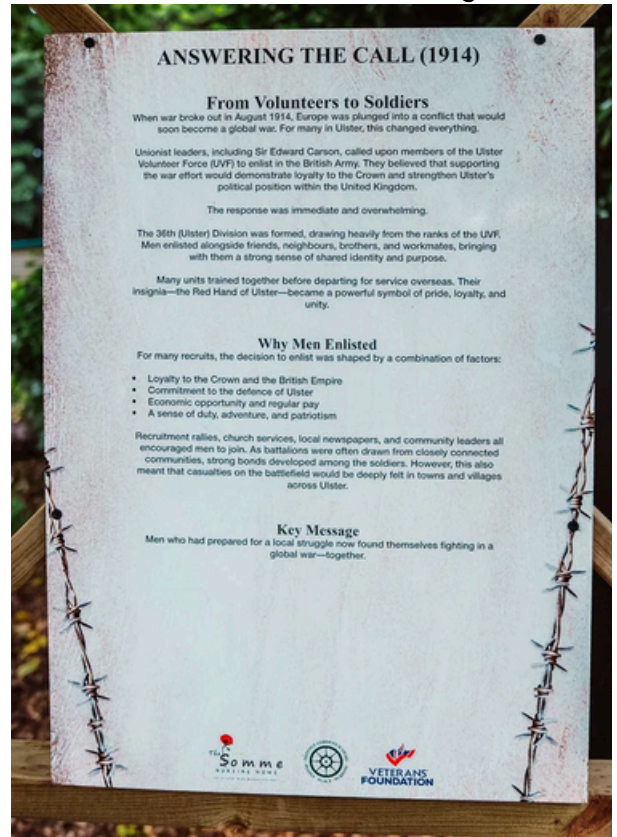
On 1 July 2026, the Defence Gardens Scheme (DGS), together with veterans, volunteers, partners and supporters, celebrated the official opening of the Thiepval Wood Project at the Somme Nursing Home in Belfast.

Created to mark the 110th anniversary of the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the garden is much more than a memorial. It brings together remembrance, education, therapeutic horticulture and wellbeing, creating a lasting space for reflection, connection and hope. Despite persistent rain, around 150 guests attended the opening – a fitting celebration of what can be achieved when veterans and communities work together.

From an Idea to a Living Memorial

The project grew from DGS's work at the Somme Nursing Home, where veterans, service leavers and military family members have been transforming the grounds since 2022. What began as horticultural activity developed into thriving spaces offering friendship, purpose and shared recovery. Veterans wanted to create something that also reflected the site's unique military heritage. With the support of the Somme Nursing Home's Executive Director, DGS National Operations Manager Charlie Marno invited therapeutic garden designer Deborah McDonald to turn that ambition into reality.

Inspired by the trench systems of Thiepval Wood and the sacrifice of the 36th (Ulster) Division, Deborah's design combines the history of the Somme with therapeutic landscape principles. Funding from the Veterans' Foundation provided vital support to bring the vision to life.



A short history notice about the 'Answering the Call' and Ulsters response to that call. Forever embedded in history, the brave and the selfless.



Above: Lord Lieutenant Dame Fionnuala Jay-O'Boyle DBE DSTJ DDL (Hon QUB) putting the Time Capsule into the ground with support from Charlie Marno DGS Operations Manager:



Right: The sentry archway to the Somme Memorial Garden guarded by two 'Tommy' silhouettes's.

Furthest Right: The baron trees represent the landscape of heavy artillery and gunfire of no-mans land. A bleak reminder of nature being stripped away but still surviving.



A Garden Filled with Meaning

Every feature has been carefully considered. Accessible pathways lead visitors through timber arbours to quiet seating areas, wildlife habitats, woodland trails and spaces for contemplation. Sculptures and restored materials from the historic estate add further opportunities for discovery and reflection.

The planting also tells a story. Red poppies represent remembrance, white poppies recognise conscientious objectors, including those who recovered bodies from no man’s land, while black poppies acknowledge the contribution of Black servicemen. A dog silhouette remembers the animals that served as messengers, sentries and companions during the First World War. Together, these elements create a garden that remembers the past while actively supporting wellbeing today.



The dog silhouette is a reminder of the vital role animals played during the First World War. Its place within the Somme Garden offers a simple tribute to their loyalty and the often-overlooked contribution they made during conflict.

A Special Opening

The garden was formally opened by His Majesty’s Lord-Lieutenant for the County Borough of Belfast, Dame Fionnuala Jay-O’Boyle DBE DStJ DDL (Hon QUB). Brigadier (Retd) Robin Bacon, Chairman of the Defence Gardens Scheme, praised the extraordinary efforts of Deborah, Charlie and the many volunteers involved, describing the garden’s thoughtful planting and meaningful design as “totally inspirational”.

The Defence Gardens Scheme extends its sincere thanks to everyone who made the project possible, including the Somme Nursing Home, Veterans’ Foundation, Deborah McDonald, Charlie Marno, RA Johnston Building Contractors, Delwyn Thompson, Sarah Kelling and the Veterans’ Foundation team, Paul McCann, the Royal Signals Association (Northern Ireland Branch), Blind Veterans UK, and every veteran, volunteer and supporter who contributed their time, skills and enthusiasm.

A Living Legacy

The Thiepval Wood Project is not simply a completed garden – it is a living legacy. As its planting matures and the space continues to evolve, it will remain somewhere veterans, residents, families and visitors can remember the past, connect with nature and experience the restorative benefits of therapeutic horticulture. For anyone visiting Belfast, the Thiepval Wood Project offers a special place to pause, reflect and remember.



A shilouette of a soldier represents the many and fallen who volunteered to give their lives for our tomorrow. In the background a shilouette of a war horse stands in memory of the fallen animals that were instrumental during WWI.



A log with helmet and hand crafted ceramic poppies signify the grave of a fallen soldier hidden beneath the earth



Every plant in the garden has been considered with care. In the memorial garden you can find poppies representing everyone including the fallen (red poppy), conscientious objectors (white poppy) and fallen animals (purple poppy). Herbs that were also used as medicine can be found in the garden.

110th Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme,

A Time to Remember & Reflect



This year marks the 110th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, a time to remember the courage, sacrifice and service of those who fought in one of the most significant battles of the First World War. The Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office marked the anniversary through acts of remembrance at home and in France, alongside the Somme 110 fundraising challenge, which brought together more than 150 veterans and supporters.

Remembering the Fallen

On 1 July, Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner David Johnstone, supported by Head of Office Alan Murphy, attended commemorative services in France at the Thiepval Memorial, Ulster Memorial Tower and Guillemont.



Standing on the ground where so many gave their lives provided a poignant opportunity to reflect on the immense courage and sacrifice of those who served, particularly the men of the 36th (Ulster) Division.

At the Ulster Memorial Tower, the Commissioner also met Carol Walker of the Somme Association, reflecting on the importance of preserving the history of the Somme and ensuring the stories of those who served are never forgotten. It was also an opportunity to present Carol with a cheque of £4,000 raised through the 110 Somme sponsored walk.



In Northern Ireland, Rachael Harger represented the Office at the annual wreath-laying ceremony at the Garden of Remembrance at Belfast City Hall.

Walking in Their Memory

Remembrance was also at the heart of the Somme 110 fundraising challenge. More than 150 veterans took part, helping to raise an outstanding £8,000, with the proceeds divided equally between the Somme Association and Air Ambulance NI. Veterans Commissioner David Johnstone later presented £4,000 to Air Ambulance Northern Ireland, recognising the charity's lifesaving work across Northern Ireland.

Our sincere thanks go to Thompson Travel for sponsoring the event t-shirts, the veterans who walked with us, and everyone who donated or provided refreshments, encouragement and practical support.

A Legacy That Endures

The 110th anniversary has been an opportunity to remember those who served, those who never returned and those whose lives were forever changed by war.

Through commemorations in France and Belfast and the generosity shown during the Somme 110 challenge, we have sought to honour their legacy while supporting organisations making a difference today.

Their courage, sacrifice and sense of duty must never be forgotten. By continuing to tell their stories, we can ensure their legacy endures for generations to come.

We will remember them.



Armed Forces Day Northern Ireland 2026

A Fantastic Day in Coleraine

Coleraine was the setting for a memorable Armed Forces Day Northern Ireland 2026, hosted by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council on Saturday 20 June. Thousands of people came together for a fantastic family day celebrating the breadth of the Armed Forces community – from those currently serving to veterans, reservists, cadets and military families. More than 500 serving personnel, veterans and cadets took part in the parade through the town, receiving a warm welcome from the crowds lining the streets.

Among those attending was the newly appointed Minister for Veterans and People, Calvin Bailey MP. Despite having only recently taken up the role, the Minister travelled to Northern Ireland for what was one of his first major public engagements, meeting members of the Armed Forces community and showing his support for the occasion.

With glorious weather adding to the atmosphere, there was plenty to see throughout the day. Highlights included the spectacular RAF Falcons parachute display, a ceremonial salute from 206 (Ulster) Battery Royal Artillery, the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Dakota flypast and, of course, the impressive parade of serving personnel, veterans and cadets.

Armed Forces Day provides an important opportunity to showcase the very best of our Armed Forces community, while bringing people together in recognition of service, dedication and sacrifice. This year was certainly no exception. With military displays, entertainment, family activities and a wonderful atmosphere throughout the town, Coleraine delivered an Armed Forces Day to remember!



Above: UDR (CGC) veterans turn out to partake in this year's Armed Forces Day NI Parade

Right: A member of the RAF Falcons Parachute Display Team lands in Coleraine for Armed Forces Day 2026



Left: Members of 206 (Ulster) Battery Royal Artillery conduct a Gun Salute in honour of Armed Forces Day 2026 in Coleraine.

Right: NI Veterans Commissioner, David Johnstone alongside Senior Royal Army Medical Service Officer, and Minister for Veterans & People, Calvin Bailey MBE MP.



New Veterans Hub Opens in Ballymena

Veterans and their families in Ballymena and the wider Mid and East Antrim area now have a new dedicated place to access support, guidance and friendship following the opening of the Ballymena Veterans Hub.

Located at 62a Church Street in Ballymena town centre, the new Hub is run by Veterans Support Group Ballymena (VSGB) and will provide a permanent and welcoming space for the local veteran community.

The Hub will offer an important point of connection for veterans and their families, helping them access support and information while also providing opportunities to meet others and enjoy the friendship and camaraderie that are so important within the veteran community.

The Ballymena Veterans Hub is the newest addition to the Thrive Together Network, coordinated by Brooke House Health and Wellbeing Centre, strengthening the network of veteran support available across Northern Ireland.

Its opening is the result of considerable hard work and dedication by VSGB Chairperson Lawrie Philpott and the wider committee, who have worked tirelessly to bring the new facility to life.

In an area with a rich military heritage, the new Hub provides a lasting base from which VSGB can continue to support veterans and their families and build an even stronger local veteran community.



Above: coordinators of the Thrive Together programme Richard Scott (MAPS) Joan Clements (Brooke House Health & Wellbeing), NI Veterans Commissioner David Johnstone, VSGB Chairperson Lawrie Philpott and Karen Hutchinson OVA (NI).

Below: Members of the Veterans Support Group Ballymena gather at the opening of the New Hub alongside invited guests.



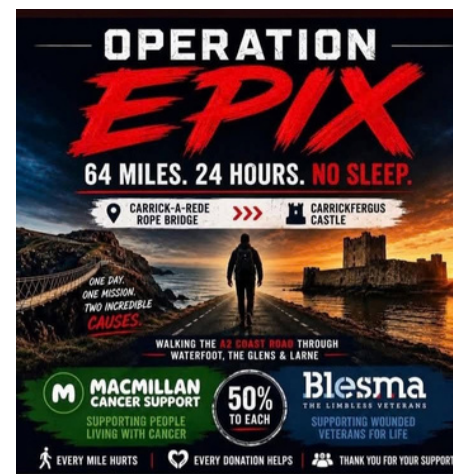
Graham Smashes 64-Mile Challenge



Congratulations to Graham Fergus, who completed an incredible 64-mile endurance challenge in support of Macmillan Cancer Support and Blesma, the Limbless Veterans.

Graham's "Operation Epix" saw him set off from Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge with the goal of reaching Carrickfergus Castle within 24 hours without sleep. In an outstanding display of determination, he completed the 64 miles in just **17 hours and 29 minutes**.

A fantastic achievement for two important causes. Well done, Graham



Making Waves at Benone Beach

Over the summer, Blesma member Caroline took to the waves at Benone Beach for an adapted surfing session, showing that trying something new can open the door to some fantastic experiences.

With support from the Mae Murray Foundation and Long Line Surf School, Caroline embraced the challenge with confidence and determination, making the most of Northern Ireland's beautiful coastline and proving that barriers don't have to stand in the way of adventure.

A huge thank you to everyone who helps make opportunities like this possible, and most importantly, well done to Caroline for giving it a go, embracing a new challenge and making some brilliant memories along the way. A wonderful example of confidence, adventure and living life to the full.



Irish Guards Charity Golf Day

At the end of August, the Irish Guards Ulster Branch held its annual Charity Golf Day at Edenmore Golf Club, bringing together supporters for a great day of golf while raising vital funds for the Ulster Branch Irish Guards Association, Army Cadets and Kidney Care UK.



The event provided a fitting opportunity to honour service and sacrifice while enjoying camaraderie, friendly competition and time outdoors. Seamus, the Regimental Mascot, was also in attendance and, as always, represented the Regiment with distinction.

Special recognition goes to Frank McCracken, whose outstanding organisation once again helped make the event such a success.

A fantastic day in support of three very worthwhile causes, well done to everyone involved.



Are you a

UK military veteran / ex-service personnel with PTSD symptoms?

Research participants needed

Study details:

- This study looks at whether a new type of therapy, called 'FIRST', can reduce symptoms of PTSD*
- The therapy is delivered online and participants will receive it either immediately on joining the study, or after a waiting period of 24 weeks

Participants must:

- be a UK military veteran
- be over the age of 18
- be living and/or working in the UK
- have a diagnosis of PTSD or be experiencing PTSD symptoms*

*Common symptoms of PTSD can include: flashbacks, nightmares, nausea, sweating, angry outbursts and insomnia

Scan the QR code
or email us to
learn more!



✉ firstpett@kcl.ac.uk

🌐 www.inspirewellbeing.org/firstpett-project/

Funded by:



Could You Help Shape a New Approach to PTSD Treatment?

Researchers at **King's College London** are inviting UK military veterans who are experiencing **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**, or **symptoms of PTSD**, to take part in an important research study exploring a new approach to treatment.

The **FIRST PTSD Experimental Treatment Trial (FIRST PETT)** is evaluating a new psychological therapy called **Fast Imagery Reversal Script for Trauma-release (FIRST)**.

FIRST has been designed with the aim of providing a **comfortable, non-traumatising and non-intrusive approach** to PTSD treatment. It is also a relatively short therapy, delivered entirely online over just **3-4 sessions**, meaning participants can take part from the comfort and privacy of their own home.

Building on promising research

The FIRST PETT study follows promising earlier work involving ex-servicemen and women. Researchers are now carrying out a larger study to better understand how effective the therapy may be for members of the wider UK veteran community.

The team is aiming to recruit **215 UK military veterans** who have PTSD or are currently experiencing symptoms associated with PTSD. Those who are eligible and choose to take part will be randomly allocated to one of two groups. Some participants will receive FIRST therapy straight away, while others will join a waiting list and receive the same therapy after **24 weeks**. This will allow the research team to carefully assess the effectiveness of the treatment.

Why take part?

PTSD can affect people in many different ways, and finding treatments that are accessible and acceptable to veterans is an important area of research. By taking part in FIRST PETT, veterans will be contributing to research that could help improve our understanding of how PTSD can be treated and inform future support for the veteran community. Participation also offers eligible veterans the opportunity to experience this new, brief therapy as part of the research study.

Interested in finding out more?

If you are a **UK military veteran** experiencing PTSD or PTSD symptoms and would like to learn more about the study, the FIRST PETT research team would be pleased to hear from you.

Getting in touch does not mean you are committing to taking part – you can contact the team to find out more and decide whether the study may be right for you.

To Contact the **FIRST PETT Study Research Team**, King's College London

Email: firstpett@kcl.ac.uk



Northern Ireland Veterans' Voice Heard at Armed Forces Covenant Conference

The Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner, David Johnstone, represented Northern Ireland at the 2026 Armed Forces Covenant Conference in June this year at Portsmouth, joining delegates from across the UK to discuss how the Armed Forces Covenant can continue to support serving personnel, veterans and their families.

The annual conference brings together representatives from Defence, government, local authorities, charities, industry and the wider Armed Forces community. It provides an important opportunity to share experiences and good practice, strengthen relationships and consider how the commitments of the Armed Forces Covenant can be translated into meaningful support across the UK.

At its heart, the Covenant is the nation's commitment to ensuring that members of the Armed Forces community are treated with fairness and respect and do not face disadvantage because of their service. Bringing Northern Ireland's experience to the conversation.

The Veterans Commissioner was invited to speak at the conference, using the opportunity to bring to life the particular realities, challenges and nuances of being a veteran or a member of the Armed Forces community living in Northern Ireland.

While many experiences are shared by veterans throughout the UK, Northern Ireland has its own distinct history and circumstances. Ensuring these differences are understood is important when developing policies and services intended to support the Armed Forces community nationwide.

The Commissioner's speech was incredibly well received, earning a standing ovation from delegates at its conclusion, a powerful response to the experiences and perspectives shared from Northern Ireland.

The conference was also a valuable opportunity to meet colleagues and organisations from across the UK, exchange ideas and learn from examples of good practice.

Most importantly, attending ensured that Northern Ireland was represented in its own right within the wider UK conversation. Opportunities such as this help build greater understanding of the Northern Ireland experience and ensure that its unique circumstances are recognised when decisions are made about support for veterans and the wider Armed Forces community.

It was a very worthwhile event and an important opportunity to represent Northern Ireland, build relationships and ensure our veterans' experiences and voices are heard at a national level.



Above: Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner, David Johnstone addresses the Armed Forces Covenant Conference in Portsmouth June 2026.



Below: Northern Ireland delegates including Veterans Champions from Local Councils, OVA (NI), RFCA (NI) and the NI Veterans Commissioners Office, who attended this years Armed Forces Covenant Conference in Portsmouth





There's LOADS!!!

Going on at AAVS this Autumn & Winter



There's plenty happening at Andy Allen Veterans Support (AAVS) this autumn and winter, with a packed programme offering veterans and their families lots of opportunities to meet up, get involved and enjoy some great company.

From the popular monthly Breakfast Club and Veterans Camera Club to a Families Halloween Night, there's something for everyone in the months ahead.



To find out more about the Santa Experience and the many other opportunities available through AAVS, email info@AAVSNI.com or telephone **028 9074 7071**.

With so much planned, there are some fantastic things for veterans and their families to look forward to throughout the autumn and winter season. Get involved, come along and be part of it!



One of the big highlights will be the Veterans Christmas Dinner, taking place on Wednesday 2nd December, from 1pm to 6pm, at the RBL Cregagh, Wandsworth and Ormeau Branch on Montgomery Road, East Belfast. Veterans can look forward to plenty of great food, entertainment and, of course, some great craic!

For more information about getting involved or to book your place at the Christmas Dinner, email Dennis at dennis@AAVSNI.com.

AAVS will also be getting into the festive spirit with its Santa Experience, available from 23rd November to 23rd December. Whether you're looking for Santa's sleigh, Santa and Mrs Claus, elves, a children's party or something a little different, bespoke packages can be catered for.



HELP for HEROES



Together
we make a
difference



CAFÉ DATES SEPT-DEC 2026

VETERANS • SERVING PERSONNEL • FAMILIES • FRIENDS



ANTRIM

📍 Manns Garden Kitchen
Antrim Castle Gardens,
Randalstown Rd, Antrim
BT41 4HL

📅 Friday 25th September 10:30-12:00
Friday 30th October 10:30-12:00
Friday 27th November 10:30-12:00
Friday 18th December 10:30-12:00



BANBRIDGE

📍 Community room, Tesco Café
at the Boulevard, Bridgewater
Retail Park, Banbridge
BT32 4LF

📅 Tuesday 29th September 14:30-16:00
Tuesday 27th October 14:30-16:00
Tuesday 24th November 14:30-16:00
Tuesday 15th December 14:30-12:00



BANGOR

📍 Pit Stop Café, Bangor,
39 Balloo Rd, BT19 7PG

📅 Wednesday 9th September 10:30-12:00
Wednesday 7th October 10:30-12:00
Wednesday 11th November 10:30-12:00
Wednesday 9th December 10:30-12:00



BELFAST

📍 Tesco Café Knocknagoney Road
Extra, Knocknagoney Road,
Belfast, BT4 2PW

📅 Tuesday 1st September 14:30-16:00
Tuesday 6th October 14:30-12:00
Tuesday 3rd November 14:30-16:00
Tuesday 1st December 14:30-16:00



CARRICKFERGUS

📍 Delacys Bakery Café,
3 North Street,
Carrickfergus, BT38 7AQ

📅 Wednesday 16th September 10:30-12:00
Wednesday 21st October 10:30-12:00
Wednesday 18th November 10:30-12:00
Wednesday 16th December 10:30-12:00



FIVEMILETOWN

📍 Rusks at Clogher Valley Golf Club,
76 Belfast Rd, Fivemiletown
BT75 0SE

📅 Friday 25th September 12:00-13:30
Friday 23rd October 12:00-13:30
Friday 27th November 12:00-13:30
Friday 18th December 12:00-13:30



LISBURN

📍 Café Vic Ryn, House of Vic-Ryn,
Moira Rd, Lisburn BT28 2RF

📅 Wednesday 16th September 14:00-15:30
Wednesday 21st October 14:00-15:30
Wednesday 18th November 14:00-15:30
Wednesday 16th December 14:00-15:30



CONTACT

Alex – 07580 901317
Glenn – 07484 026991



Tea & coffee
provided by
Help for Heroes



Tables booked under
"Community
Development"



Please confirm
veterance to assist
with accessibility
needs and table bookings.



Missing the feeling of community?

We get it and so do the rest of our veterans and families who come along.
Join us for a cuppa and chat, and hear about the wonderful opportunities
for the Armed Forces Community in your own area.



If you know another
veteran friend/family member
who could use a bit of the same,
bring them along too!

#HelpForHeroes

#VeteransCommunity

#ArmedForcesCommunity

#CommunityCafé

NOVA Northern Ireland is now live!

Forces Employment Charity Update

NOVA Northern Ireland is a new service providing specialist support to veterans in the justice system in Northern Ireland. It is delivered by the Forces Employment Charity, the UK's leading provider of justice services to the veteran community. The service aims to reduce reoffending by providing a single, tailored support pathway for veterans.

On referral, NOVA provides veterans with a caseworker who will conduct a needs assessment and create a managed care plan with the veteran. This life-changing, and often lifesaving, intervention includes practical and emotional support for a range of issues, including housing, finance, substance misuse, mental health and employment.

NOVA accepts self-referrals from veterans living in Northern Ireland, as well as referrals from statutory bodies and charities.

Referrals for veterans include those who are:

- At risk of arrest or re-offending – with a focus on early intervention and de-escalation
- In contact with the police during investigation or prosecution
- Subject to community-based sentences or probation supervision
- Returning to the community following release from prison

To make a referral to NOVA Northern Ireland:

With the veteran's consent, organisations can refer a veteran using the [NOVA referral form](#) or by sending an email to our secure CJSM account novani@forcesemployment.cjsm.net with details of the individual (name, address, contact number, email address, service number if known).

The caseworker for NOVA NI is Alana Surgenor. Her contact details are:

Email: alana.surgenor@forcesemployment.org.uk

Phone: 07805725242

CEO Update

We are thrilled to announce the appointment of Matt Bazeley OBE as our new Chief Executive. This marks the next chapter in the Charity's 141-year history of supporting the Armed Forces community.

Matt, who retired from the Army in 2022 as a Brigadier, brings 30 years of leadership and military experience. Since enlisting in 1992, he served worldwide, including deployments to Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, and across South Asia and Africa.

Speaking about his new appointment, Matt said:

"I am honoured to have been appointed as the next Chief Executive of the Forces Employment Charity. It is an organisation with a proud heritage that provides a truly transformative impact to veterans and their families as they seek civilian employment – something I personally experienced as I left the military in 2022."

"Building on its strong foundations and recent growth, I look forward to working with colleagues to deliver its vital mission at national scale. I am particularly focused on strengthening partnerships, expanding sustainable opportunities, and ensuring lasting impact for the Armed Forces community."



COMBAT STRESS

Supporting Armed Forces Mental Health

For some veterans, the psychological impact of military service can continue long after they leave the Armed Forces. The impact of military trauma may not become fully apparent for years, affecting mental health, relationships, employment and everyday life. For those living with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), accessing specialist support can be life changing.

Combat Stress is the UK's leading charity for Armed Forces mental health. The charity provides specialist treatment and support for veterans with PTSD resulting from military service, while helping members of the wider Armed Forces community access the right support for their needs. Its vision is a future in which everyone in the Armed Forces community has good mental health and those affected by military trauma can live full and meaningful lives.

The need for specialist support remains significant. Around one in ten UK veterans have probable PTSD, rising to nearly one in five among those who served in combat roles in Iraq and Afghanistan. Veterans wait an average of 14 years after leaving service before seeking help, often meaning their difficulties have become more severe and entrenched by the time they receive support.

The experiences of veterans in Northern Ireland help illustrate why this support is so important.

Founded in 1919 to support those living with what was then known as "shell shock", Combat Stress has more than a century of experience helping veterans rebuild their lives. Support includes a free, confidential 24/7 Helpline, comprehensive clinical assessments, specialist treatment programmes, family support, psychoeducation and peer support services.

Whilst, in the past, PTSD was often considered to be something some veterans just 'had to learn to live with', recovery is possible: 97% of those who undertake treatment with Combat Stress report a good or very good experience, 81% report improved mental health and more than 70% recover from PTSD. This high recovery rate includes veterans in Northern Ireland; despite the additional challenges they face.

Alongside treatment, research and education, Combat Stress is helping to ensure that veterans, including those whose experiences stem from service in Northern Ireland, receive the specialist support they need to live full and meaningful lives.



If you're a veteran struggling with your mental health – experiencing flashbacks, difficulty sleeping, feeling on edge, emotionally numb, or avoiding certain situations – these could be signs of PTSD. You are not alone.

Our free, confidential Helpline is available 24/7 and can be used by all those in the Armed Forces community including veterans, serving personnel and their families. Please reach out, we're here to listen and help.

You can speak to a member of the Helpline team by **calling 0800 138 1619**. If you prefer, you can send an **email to helpline@combatstress.org.uk**. You can also **text us on 07537 173 683**. Please note that standard text message rates may apply.

NI Veteran & Family Support

This list does not include all services available in Northern Ireland, please contact the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioners Office for further information of available veteran services.

Local Veteran Support

Veterans Services NI
(Formerly Veterans Welfare Service NI)
E: dbsafvs-vs-ni-roi@mod.gov.uk
Tel: 0738 705 0564

Northern Ireland Veterans
Commissioner's Office
E: commissioner@nivco.co.uk
Tel: 02825 483169

Andy Allen Veteran Support NI
www.aavsnl.com
Tel: 02890 747071

Decorum NI
www.decorumni.co.uk
Tel: 02891 457565

Ely Centre
www.elycentre.com
Tel: 02866 320977

Military & Police Support
West Tyrone (MAPS)
www.mapswesttyrone.org.uk
Tel: 02882 245459

MUVE – Mid-Ulster Victims
Empowerment
www.muve.org.uk
Tel: 02886 763349

Serving & Ex Serving Womens
Network
E: jen@cw-ni.co.uk
Tel: 07740580123

South East Fermanagh
Foundation
www.seff.org.uk
Tel: 02867 723884

South & East Tyrone Welfare
Support
Email: setw@btconnect.com
Tel: 028 8772 6152

RAFA Contact Centre:
0800 018 2361
NI Region:
Wg Cdr N Williams
07739 191958

Regenerate Veterans Group
Email:
regenerateveterans@outlook.com

Veteran Health & Wellbeing

Beyond the Battlefield
www.beyondthebattlefield.org
Tel: 02891 228389

BLESMA –
The Limbless Charity
www.blesma.org
Tel: 07766258461 or
07741744617

Brooke House
www.brookehouse.co.uk
Tel: 02889 531223

Combat Stress
www.combatstress.org.uk
Tel: 02890 269990

Defence Medical Welfare
Service NI (Veterans)
E: referralsNI@dmws.org.uk
Tel: 0800 999 3697

Help for Heroes
www.helpforheroes.org.uk
Tel: 0300 3039888

Inspire wellbeing
www.inspirewellbeing.org
Tel: 02890 328474

Royal British Legion
www.britishlegion.org.uk
Tel: 0808 802808

Walking With The Wounded
walkingwiththewounded.org.uk
Tel: 01263 863900

Benevolence Funding & Finance

Army Benevolent Fund
www.thesoldierscharity.org
Tel: 02892 678112

Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund
www.rafbf.org
Tel: 03001 021919

Royal Navy &
Royal Marines Charity
www.rnrma.org.uk
Tel: 02393 871520

SSAFA –
The Armed Forces Charity
www.ssafa.org.uk
Tel: 02890 327740

UDR Benevolent Fund
www.udrbenfund.org.uk
Email: info@udrbenfund.org.uk
Tel: 07720 677838

Make the Call
www.nidirect.gov.uk/makethecall
Tel: 0800 2321271

Pensions

Forces Pension Society
www.forcespensionsociety.org
Tel: 02078 209988

Veterans UK
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk
Tel: 0808 1914218

Jobs/Training

Forces Employment Charity
E: a.sturgenor@forcesemployment.org.uk
Tel: 07805 725242

Connect Through Service
www.trust-cts.com
Tel: 07796 084069

Legal Support

Reid Black Solicitors
www.reidblack.com
Tel: 02895 922744