

OCTOBER 2022

Veterans' Newsletter

From the Northern Ireland
Veterans' Support Office



Dear friends and colleagues,

Welcome to the fourth edition of our NIVSO Newsletter. I hope you are all well and are finding ways to connect with and support each other in these turbulent times. It has been a challenging year in many ways and we will all have been affected and much moved by the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the poignancy of that event remains as we enter the period of Remembrance, so eloquently described by the Veterans Commissioner in these pages. May I recommend to you, his mobile exhibition "We Will Remember" and associated talk in November.

Many thanks to all who have contributed to this edition, and for sharing your stories with us. We have also looked to our network for advice and information to assist you with the Cost of Living crisis, and have outlined some sources of support that may be able to assist you and your family in these uncertain times. In this edition we are also putting out a call for veterans and family members affected by the pre-2000 ban on LGBT+ UK military service to contribute their lived experience evidence to the Government's LGBT Veterans Independent Review. We also welcome a new member of staff to our wider team, Brian Williams, as the new Defence Medical Welfare Services Navigator; Brian carries on the important role of enabling service families leaving the military with support and guidance to help with their transition into civilian life and in tackling loneliness within the wider veteran community.

There is plenty more in this edition - a fantastic experience for Blesma members at this year's Belfast Tattoo and plenty to get involved in, such as another round of best practice and good governance training for veteran-supporting organisations, and for those budding radio DJs out there, an opportunity to hit the airwaves! Do listen in to our veteran-led radio programme *Sunday Serving* on Big Hits Radio, which we will be developing over the coming months.

Finally, we would like to extend a very warm welcome to Brigadier (Ret'd) Mike Murdoch, the incoming Chief Executive of RFCA NI, who provides oversight, guidance and support to the NIVSO office. We wish our former Chief Executive, Colonel (Ret'd) Johnny Rollins, all the very best in his retirement and express our sincere thanks for all his support to NIVSO and the wider veteran community over the years.

We do hope you enjoy this issue of the newsletter, and please let us know if you have any comments or ideas for future editions. Most importantly, please do get in touch if you or someone you know needs a little extra help at the moment. There is plenty of support available which you can see on our new website www.nivso.org.uk and if you would like to access that support, or indeed act as a buddy for someone, do please give us a call. We very much look forward to sharing your Remembrance events and stories in our next edition.

**Head of the Northern Ireland
Veterans' Support Office**

Blesma Outreach Officer and Members Reflect On Belfast International Tattoo



"One of my proudest moments, the experience was unreal."

"Extremely emotional from the moment we entered the arena, you could feel the energy."

"Made me feel like a part of something special."

"It was an honour."

"I felt extremely proud of what we had just been part of."

"An amazing experience."

Fiona Morrison, Outreach Officer for Blesma in Northern Ireland recounts some stand-out moments from this year's Belfast International Tattoo, where Blesma took centre stage as the chosen charity for the event in Belfast's SSE Arena.

This year, Blesma the Limbless Veterans, who are celebrating their 90th Anniversary, was the appointed charity for the spectacular Belfast International Tattoo. This was, without a doubt, the highlight of our year here in Northern Ireland.

Not only was this a fantastic opportunity to raise awareness and funds but also to represent Blesma in the show. A small number of Members, a Widow and a Volunteer joined with the acts and performers across the globe to take part in each performance, receiving a standing ovation from the moment they entered the arena drowning out the compère - that's definitely a moment I will never forget!



A huge thank you must go to the Blesma NI volunteers and the associations who came along and supported, along with Blesma members and their family members, with the bucket collection across all 3 performances raising an incredible £7512.20 to support our charitable work, an extraordinary amount given the current climate.

If you would like to learn more about Blesma's work in Northern Ireland, contact Fiona: outreachni@blesma.org

Cost of Living Crisis - Help for Veterans

We appreciate that in the current economic climate people are under a lot of pressure to cope with the cost of living. We want to assure you that help is out there for you and your families, and these are just some of the organisations that can help take action to ease your financial worries. Support is also available at www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/cost-living and The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership has information on what support is available in your local area: www.cypsp.hscni.net

Thank you to all our organisations supporting veterans and their families during these unprecedented times.



The Royal British Legion has launched new emergency Cost of Living Grant Programme to help members of the Armed Forces community.

This programme is designed to allow the RBL to assist people who need help in a quick and easy way with everyday essentials such as kitchen appliances, clothes, and energy costs.

This programme is open to anyone who is eligible for support struggling to pay for items and services they need.

Visit the RBL website to find out more: www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-support/financial-and-employment-support/finance/grants/cost-of-living-grants



The RAF Benevolent Fund help RAF veterans, serving members of the RAF and their partners and dependent children under 18.

If you are an RAF veteran you can apply online for financial help up to the value of £750.

If the assistance you require is greater than £750, then there are other ways they can help.

Please call 0300 102 1919 or make an enquiry for help online:

www.rafbf.org/request-our-help-form



The Royal Naval Benevolent Trust has nearly £3million of funding available this year, which can be used to help towards living expenses, house repairs, disability aids, job training and care home top-up fees for you and your family.

If you are current or former Naval personnel please come forward to access RNBT's life-changing support during the current increase in the cost of living.

Phone: 02392 690112

Email: help@rnbt.org.uk

Find out more at: www.RNBT.org.uk



Walking With the Wounded can assist you with financial needs through their Quick Reaction Fund.

Whether it's helping cover the cost of a laptop to complete an online course, buy a new pair of shoes for your child or help with travel costs to get you to a job interview, WWTW will do their best to assist you on a case by case basis.

Please visit www.walkingwiththewounded.org.uk to find out more, or contact our Care Coordinator, Louise, for more information: louise.mccreadie@wwtw.org.uk

Veterans' Adviceline For Statutory Professionals (VASP) Celebrates Launch



On Friday 21st October we were delighted to attend the Veterans' Adviceline for Statutory Professionals (VASP) programme launch.

We were joined by colleagues from the veteran support network & representatives from a range of statutory services in Northern Ireland.

The VASP Project is a Northern Ireland signposting service whereby individuals who come across veterans as clients or constituents in their routine interactions can contact the VASP Adviceline to obtain signposting support from the myriad of Veteran organisations and State Welfare Services available to support veterans and their families in Northern Ireland.

VASP Project Manager, Mark Ewing, said: "The VASP service is here to help you, and to help veterans - connecting them to essential support services to meet their needs."

This is a two-year project funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund, with the hope that it will remain in place beyond the project timeline. The Adviceline is facilitated by the Somme Nursing Home, sits within the supporting structure that is based upon the Veterans Support Office (VSO) and is endorsed by the NI Commissioner for Veterans.

Thank you to guest speakers, the Lord-Lieutenant of County Antrim, Mr David McCorkell, former Chief Executive of RFCA NI Col (Ret'd) Johnny Rollins, Founder of Andy Allen Veterans' Support, Andy Allen MBE, and VASP Project Manager, Mark Ewing.



Adviceline: 07551 397384
Email: VASP@sommenursing.org



HM Lord-Lieutenant of County Antrim, Mr David McCorkell welcomed guests.



Former Chief Executive of RFCA NI Col (Ret'd) Johnny Rollins, explained the background for the project.



Founder of Andy Allen Veterans' Support, Andy Allen MBE, highlighted the type of support available to veterans in NI.

LGBT Veterans Independent Review

As part of the LGBT Veterans Independent Review, we are asking veterans and their allies to come forward with their stories in the call for evidence.

Our Northern Ireland Veterans' Places, Pathways and People delivery partner, Fighting With Pride, has developed extensive supporting information, and a Call for Evidence Guide to help you through the process:

Before January 2000, when the ban on LGBT+ UK military service was finally lifted, LGBT+ personnel were shamefully dismissed or forced out of military service without forewarning and with no regard for employment, housing, financial or emotional support. They faced prison for a crime that had no place in civil law, medals were snatched from their chests, pensions and resettlement provisions were denied, they were fined, shamed, assaulted, and then 'discharged in disgrace'.

Despite the UK Armed Forces evolving into today's exemplar employers of LGBT+ personnel, nothing has been done to support those LGBT+ Veterans. The health and wellbeing impacts have not been researched though anecdotal evidence suggests many still endure consequential hardship and mental health struggles and remain isolated from the military family and support services.

The current Independent Inquiry & Call for Evidence is a moment for LGBT+ veterans affected by the ban to be recognised and to tell the Independent LGBT Veterans Review what happened. The Government accepts that our LGBT+ veterans met the challenges of military service. This Review will help find out what happened and what must be done. We need LGBT+ veterans to step forward and tell us what happened to you and how it has affected your life. It's not just those who were 'Dismissed in Disgrace', or sent to prison for being LGBT+. The Review needs to hear from ALL veterans affected/involved/witnessed by the ban and also the families of those we have lost. The Review also wants to hear from those who survived the oppression of the ban and served beyond 2000.

We know that LGBT+ veterans left the Armed Forces in lots of different ways, some via prison, some through administrative process, some forced to retire, others because they felt they had no choice. No matter how you left, the Review needs to hear from you. All your accounts are invaluable. Your evidence can support the Independent Review to shape a better future for those affected by the ban, please step forward.

The evidence giving completes on 1st December. If you were affected or if you know somebody who may have been affected, tell them about the Independent Review and help us make sure that our LGBT+ veterans get the help and support they need, and their stories are told.

FWP has LGBT+ Veterans Community Workers across the UK. They can support you, so that everyone has the opportunity and means to provide their own lived-experience accounts as evidence. Your Area Representative for Northern Ireland is Dougie Morgan. Email dougie.morgan@fightingwithpride.org.uk to connect today.

To submit evidence as part of the Review visit:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/call-for-evidence



Updates from the Northern Ireland Veterans' Commissioner

During challenging times the voice for our veterans, Danny Kinahan, reflects on a year of change.

As we approach this year's period of Remembrance, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, our former Commander-in-Chief. I know I speak on behalf of the entire veteran community in Northern Ireland, in acknowledging her dedication during a lifetime of service, that shone as a beacon of example to us all who had the privilege to serve under her.

While we enter the season of Remembrance, it is also important to learn from the lessons of the past and look to the future. In doing so, we must ensure that our veterans are looked after with the appropriate care and support systems in place that they deserve.

Over the past nine months, as a priority, my office has sought to reach out into the veteran community to provide veterans the opportunity to gain knowledge and to meet, both local and national, organisations face to face, that are there to support them, if required.

Veteran Information Roadshows have taken place throughout Northern Ireland, from Cookstown to Antrim, Portadown to Coleraine, Newtownards to Enniskillen and most recently in Belfast, the message is getting out there, but we still have more to do.



Danny Kinahan and Alan Murphy from the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioners' Office laid a floral tribute in honour of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

Whatever your need, be it veteran specific peer support through mens/hens sheds, employment, outdoor pursuits, breakfast clubs, fitness, mental health support or benevolence, there are a range of organisations across Northern Ireland that can assist.

Therefore, in the winter months, amid the cost of living crisis, I would urge any veteran in need to reach out so that help can be given. Now, more than ever, it is important to look after each other and know where you can get help should you find yourself or others in times of need.

As 2022 draws to a close and we enter the shorter days of the winter months, it is my desire that every veteran living in Northern Ireland knows that they have a phone number to call if they need assistance. No veteran should feel isolated, forgotten or abandoned. Can I ask that you contact your former military colleagues and make sure that they are doing okay? Often it is that unexpected phone call or visit that can make the difference to someone's day and indeed life.

Should I, or my office be able to assist any veteran or family member of a veteran, please get in touch. We are here to serve you, be your voice, and make sure that our veterans in Northern Ireland are looked after as best we can.



— “ —
Now, more than ever, it is important to look after each other and know where you can get help should you find yourself or others in times of need.
— ” —



Upcoming Events from the Northern Ireland Veterans' Commissioner

Many of the veterans I have met served during Operation BANNER and have done so with immense courage, conviction and integrity. It is important to remember these veterans' who served during the difficult and dark days of our Troubles, and to allow them the space and platform to tell their story. As such, I am proud that my office is facilitating a mobile museum exhibition entitled 'We Will Remember' at the home of our office in Cullybackey. This exhibition will run from Wednesday 9th to Saturday 12th November.

In addition, Ulster Defence Regiment CGC Veteran, Glen Espie BEM, will be our guest speaker on Thursday 10th November at 7.30pm, to tell his story of the two assassination attempts on his life by the IRA. All veterans, family members and the public are welcome to attend both the exhibition and presentation.

Those wishing to attend the 'The Terrorist Knocks Twice' presentation by Glen Espie, are asked to register attendance via our website www.nivco.co.uk as we are limited by capacity.



The Terrorist Knocks Twice

Guest Speaker - Glen Espie BEM

Thursday 10th November. 7.30pm

**Toast Restaurant
Main Street, Cullybackey**

Glen Espie BEM - former UDR soldier, Glen survived two terrorist murder attempts on his life and tells his extraordinary story of survival.

**This event is limited in numbers - please register via our website
www.nivco.co.uk or call 07971 833160**



We Will Remember

**Op Banner Exhibition
Wed 9 - Sat 12 November 2022**



**Daily 10am - 7pm (4 pm on Saturday)
2nd Floor, Maine Business Centre
Main Street, Cullybackey**

Email commissioner@nivco.co.uk or call 07971 833160 for more info

Calling all Veteran Groups & Hubs!



NIVSO Best Practice and Good Governance Training in Conjunction with NICVA Thursday 17th November 2022



The Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office is committed to supporting Veteran Hubs to grow within their community, assist them with funding applications and encourage and maintain their links with other organisations within the network.

With increased funding opportunities comes increased responsibility on organisations to demonstrate good governance in the roll out of funded programmes and to successfully monitor and evaluate programmes in order that future funding applications will be more successful, based on a proven track record of transparent qualitative and quantitative outputs. We have teamed up with the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) to devise relevant training around the concept of best practice in financial management and good governance for committee members of our Hubs.

Organisations are invited to bring committee members involved in the financial management of their organisation - we suggest 2-3 people per organisation would be ideal. This training will be particularly useful to treasurers, secretaries and committee members generally involved in the management of money and funding.

We strongly encourage you to attend. Having adequate, relevant and appropriate training as a responsible Committee member is vital. It protects and informs you, your organisation and its members. We hope that this day will also be a great opportunity to network with other organisations who are dedicated to supporting Veterans, meet the NIVSO team and learn new skills within a relaxed, social environment.

Places will be allocated on a first come first served basis and if we cannot accommodate all respondents at this session, we will automatically include you in the next training session.

Programme

Good Governance 10am - 12.30pm

- Legal and best practice requirements
- The Code of Good Governance
- Duties of charity trustees and company directors
- The role of the Committee/board
- Running effective meetings
- Succession planning



Resources, toolkits and templates will be provided for both sessions



Basic Finance record keeping & financial management 1pm - 3pm

- Setting up and maintaining the books (income and expenditure ledger, petty cash)
- Cash handling
- Understanding charity funds (restricted and unrestricted) and accounts
- The role of the treasurer
- Preparing a budget

Guest speaker Iain McAfee from the National Lottery Community Fund will also be on hand to offer advice and guidance to participants.

**NIVSO Conference Room
25 Windsor Park
Belfast
BT9 6FR**

Free with lunch provided

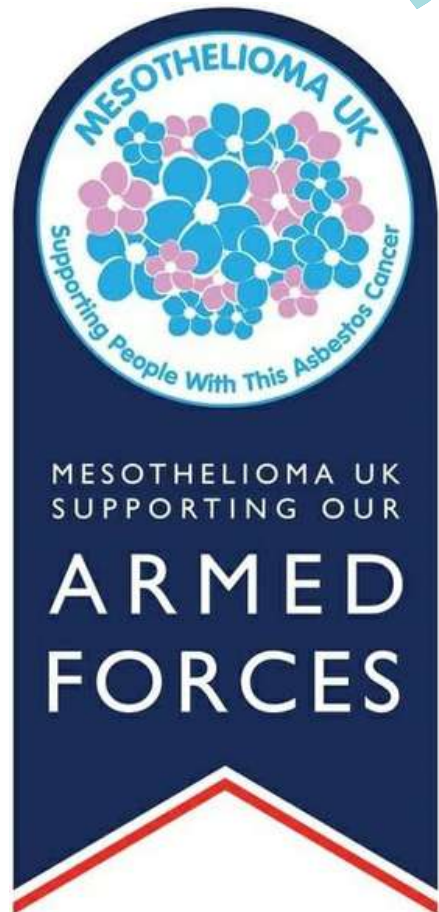
**To register for this training
please email Fiona:
ni-vsodep@rfca.mod.uk**

Mesothelioma UK Supporting Our Armed Forces

We recently spoke with Mesothelioma Clinical Nurse Specialist, Anne Moylan, from Mesothelioma UK. Anne told us about her role with the organisation, and brought us up to date on the type of support available to veterans who are affected by this type of cancer.

We want to empower people with knowledge and information, to mention that they may have been exposed to asbestos if they have symptoms.

- Mesothelioma Clinical Nurse Specialist,
Anne Moylan



What is mesothelioma?

Mesothelioma is a form of cancer that affects the mesothelium, which is a thin membrane that lines the inner surface of certain organs in the body. Mesothelioma is more common in men than in women and nearly half of the people diagnosed with the disease are over 75 years old, with exposure to asbestos being responsible for up to 9 out of 10 cases.

The Military Experience of Mesothelioma Study

Mesothelioma UK was given a grant by the AFCFT to fund The Military Experience of Mesothelioma Study (MiMES). During the project, various stakeholders who work with veterans with mesothelioma reported that anyone making a claim with sea-going service during and after World War 2, up to the early 1970s, will be presumed to have been asbestos exposed, and their Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) claims are likely to be successful

There were a range of situations in which those surveyed had been exposed to asbestos. In many cases veterans had not been aware of the dangers of asbestos until many years after the exposure had occurred. Ongoing exposure to asbestos was also highlighted as a concern.

Participants also described examples where combat may have exposed them to asbestos, for example “searching bombed out” buildings, bomb blasts and searching for ammunition in old buildings/factories. Some participants discussed actually working in buildings that had been bombed. This illustrates how having an Armed Forces background may create specific challenges when undertaking an occupational asbestos exposure history.

If you would like to speak with a nurse, you can phone 0800 169 2409 Monday - Friday 08:30-16:00 or email support@mesothelioma.uk.com for more information and support.

A dedicated Mesothelioma UK Armed Forces Group has also been set up on Facebook. If you would like to connect with this online community, visit: www.facebook.com/groups/mesoUKarmedforces



"I never really thought about how things had affected me before this conversation today."

VETERAN SERVICE USER AT BROOKE HOUSE HEALTH & WELLBEING CENTRE

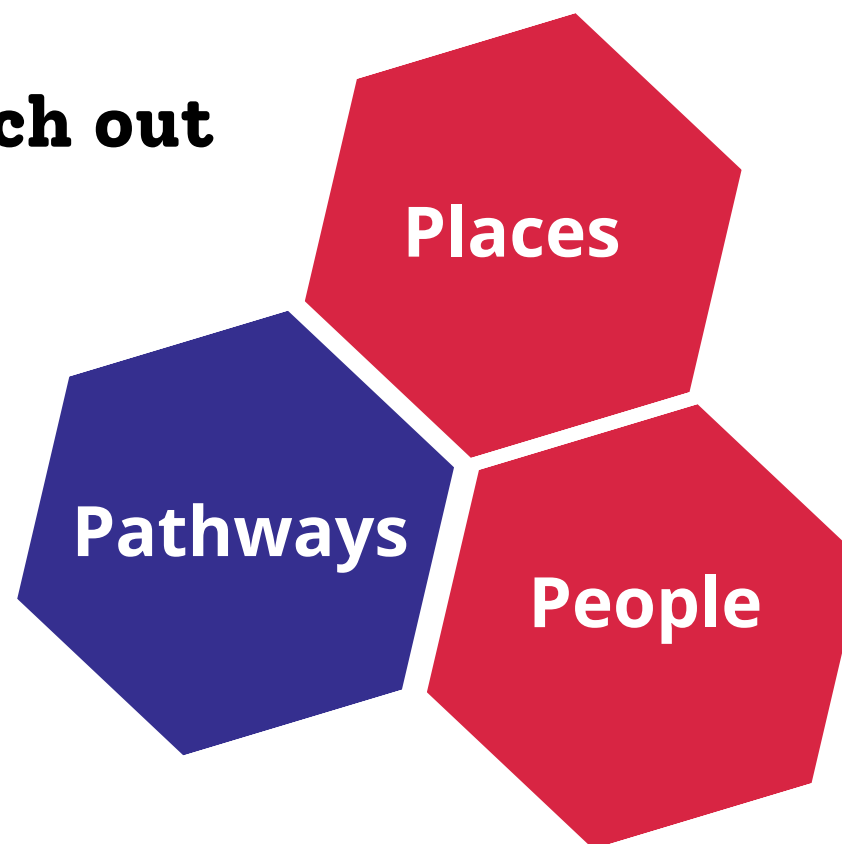
If you are a veteran living in Northern Ireland and experiencing mental health issues we want to help.

Through our Veterans' Places, Pathways & People Programme we can connect you to peer support and high level mental health services, including psychiatric support and PTSD diagnosis through our trusted delivery partners.

Sometimes taking that first step to reach out can help the rest fall into place.

Phone 028 9521 6784
Email info@nivso.org.uk

 **THE ARMED FORCES
COVENANT FUND TRUST**




Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office

Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust Funding



The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust have two major funding programmes currently open for applications. We are encouraging all our veteran support organisations and groups who may be eligible for this funding to apply.

Force for Change programme - This programme will award grants of up to £10,000 for community projects that reduce isolation and promote integration; supporting post-Covid recovery in local Armed Forces communities affected by isolation.

Reaching and Supporting Armed Forces Communities programme - The Reaching and Supporting Armed Forces Communities programme will award grants of up to £100,000 over a period of up to three years.

For more information, please visit the Covenant Fund Trust's website: www.covenantfund.org.uk/programmes



The Veterans' Foundation Funding

If you represent a charity or an organisation that provide assistance to serving and former members of the British Armed Forces who are in need, you can apply for a grant from the Veterans' Foundation.

The maximum grant is currently £30K, however, the Veterans' Foundation also provides salary grants, which can amount to £40K spread over two years for salaries, to help small and medium-wealth organisations.

The application process for all grants is online here: www.veteransfoundation.org.uk/grant-application

If you have any queries, please contact grants@veteransfoundation.org.uk

Sighted Guide Training with Guide Dogs NI

We have been kindly sent this information from our colleague Karen at Blind Veterans UK.

The team at Blind Veterans UK work closely with Guide Dogs, and would like us to share with you this free training opportunity with Guide Dogs Northern Ireland

It's available to any organisation and open to staff, volunteers and members.

For more information about this training and Guide Dogs NI please contact Paula:

Email
Paula.McLarnon@guidedogs.org.uk or
call 07766 526873



Learn how to guide people with sight loss, & make your workplace or community more inclusive

- An introduction to common eye conditions & their impact.
- Emotional and practical implications of living with a vision impairment.
- Awareness of access rights & barriers to independence.
- How to use sighted guiding technique to enable individuals and groups to be more confident in supporting someone with vision impairment.

Contact Paula at Paula.McLarnon@guidedogs.org.uk or call **07766 526873** to find out more!

There are currently **two million people** in the UK living with sight loss, with this number predicted to **double** by 2050. At Guide Dogs our aim is to increase the number of people who are trained in sighted guiding across the UK, to help create a more inclusive society for people with vision impairment.

87% of people surveyed said that improving the general public's guiding skills would have a **positive or very positive impact** on their lives

Sighted guiding is a useful life skill. It gives staff or volunteers **confidence** when they meet people who are blind or partially sighted, and the guiding techniques to help them if they need it. By completing this training you will be helping Guide Dogs to **transform public spaces** in the UK, so that they are welcoming for people with vision impairments.

"It is really easy to learn and would not only benefit the person you are assisting but it would also give you the feel good factor. It doesn't cost you anything and it takes very little time to learn but with huge benefits."

We can offer:

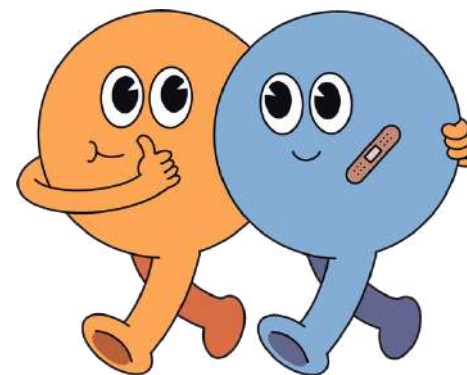
- 1 hour **virtual session**
- 2-3 hour **face-to-face session** including an opportunity for the participants to **practise guiding skills**.

Take a step towards making your workplace or community more inclusive and learn an essential life skill.





Can you be a Veteran Buddy?



Families4Veterans are an organisation linking veterans and families with help and support when they need it. Part of this is mutual support through a Buddy system.

Families4Veterans are looking for Buddies in Northern Ireland to join their team to help us reach each other, and help you if you are in need.

If you would like to join the team or find out more, visit www.families4veterans-directory.com or call the Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office for more details: 028 9521 6784

Please link in with our new NIVSO website and social media channels to stay up to date with our activities!



www.nivso.org.uk



@VeteransNI



@ni_veterans_
support_office



@NorthernIreland
VeteransSupportOffice



SUNDAY SERVING

**MUSIC - INFORMATION
COMMUNITY - COMMUNICATION**

www.BigHitsRadio.uk
6pm - 8pm

We are delighted to be working with Big Hits Radio to support veterans in radio production training. If you would like to be involved in the training please get in touch! You can tune into Sunday Serving from 6-8pm on Sundays at www.BigHitsRadio.uk

Email your shout outs and song requests to sundayserving628@gmail.com and follow Sunday Serving on Instagram @sunday_serving to stay connected.