

# VETERANS' NEWSLETTER



Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office

EDITION 6: APRIL 2023

From the Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office

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From conferences to community events, we have been busy connecting with you, our veteran community.

### Features

In this edition we explore people, places, and ideas that are shaping our community and making a difference in the lives of others.

### Events

Catch a glimpse of upcoming events that are not to be missed. From Coronation celebrations to careers fairs there's something for everyone coming up in Northern Ireland.



Veterans' Champions events across NI



Interview with the Cold Water Warrior

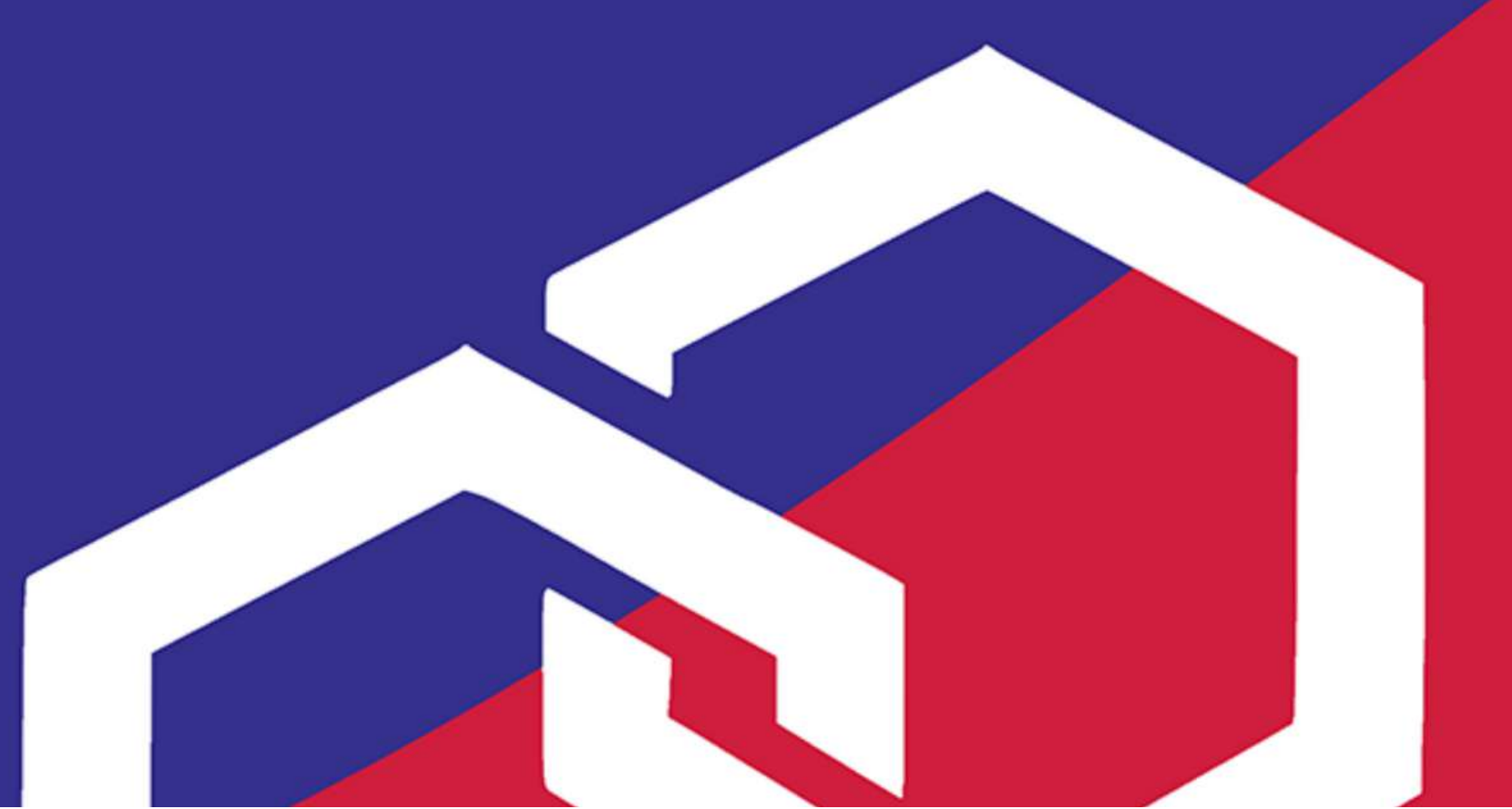


Serving and Ex Serving Women's Network Launch event

APRIL 2023

# Veterans' Newsletter

## From the Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office



**Dear friends and colleagues,**


Welcome to edition number 6 of our NIVSO quarterly newsletter, where we continue to highlight the incredible and very diverse work being done by various organisations and individuals who are supporting our veteran community throughout Northern Ireland. There is so much to look back on and so much to look forward to this coming month, particularly with so many community based events happening across NI in celebration of the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III and Queen Camilla, some of which are highlighted on page 12.

In this edition, we bring you exclusive interviews with Cold Water Warrior and Beyond the Battlefield, whose new initiatives are making a real difference in the lives of those who have served. We also feature the work of Progress Through Scuba Diving, all of which evidence the benefits of being on, in or near water for mental and physical health.

Bringing people and organisations together to share and discuss issues affecting the veteran community continues to be a theme for NIVSO. We are delighted to share news about the successful Forces in Mind Trust event that we recently hosted, which brought together our colleagues from the veteran support network, policymakers, and veterans to discuss the challenges facing the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant here in Northern Ireland. We are particularly pleased about the success of our newest programme, to support the 11 Veterans' Champions where as you can see on pages 15 and 16 so many excellent community events have been hosted throughout NI. We are also glad to feature the recent Royal Corps of Transport reunion, facilitated by our Defence Medical Welfare Services colleague and Navigator, Brian Williams. Additionally, we have exciting updates on upcoming events, including the 18 May launch event on HMS Caroline for our Serving and Ex-Serving Women's Network, which is already growing.

And finally our congratulations to the Veterans Commissioner for Northern Ireland, Danny Kinahan, who has been reappointed in his role for a further term of three years. We are privileged to work closely with Danny and his staff on a number of important initiatives and we are glad to include regular updates from his Office on the pages of our Newsletter.

As always, we are grateful for your ongoing support, encourage you to get involved in our forthcoming events and initiatives and to share this Newsletter widely with fellow members of the veteran community in NI. Enjoy the upcoming months and the outdoor events they will bring and we will see you again soon!

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



# NIVSO & FiMT Host Workshop On *A Decade Of The Covenant Report*

On Wednesday 15th March the Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office hosted a workshop alongside the Forces in Mind Trust on the report *A Decade of the Covenant*. The focus of the day was reducing disadvantage and strengthening support for the veteran community in Northern Ireland.

We were joined by veterans and colleagues from veteran support organisations, representatives from the statutory sector, Veterans' Champions and our Veterans' Commissioner for Northern Ireland, Danny Kinahan.

Tom McBarnet, Chief Executive of the Forces in Mind Trust, opened the event. He said: "Support for the Armed Forces Community happens in many different and subtle ways, and a lot of unrecognised ways. We went to understand all dimensions... our intention today is to focus on what more can be done to reduce disadvantage."



Chief Executive of the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association Northern Ireland, Mike Murdoch provided some context for the Covenant in Northern Ireland. He said: "In 2021 the Armed Forces Act became law, but due to the lack of an executive in Northern Ireland it hasn't gained the ground they hoped for."

Mike added, "It's wonderful how many people want to support the Armed Forces Community here, and veterans in particular... your generosity is deeply impressive."

Independent consultant and report co-author Meri Mayhew presented a summary of the research to the audience. She said: "Many of these policies are devolved issues... Trying to understand the effect of the Covenant compared to other things going on is tricky."

Meri also said that during the research phase of the report: "Veterans told us they didn't feel comfortable disclosing their veteran status to their GP... so they felt they faced unique disadvantage."

Meri added: "We heard about sources of support felt to be extremely positive, for example the role of the Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office, the work of the Northern Ireland Commissioner's Office, and the veteran support charities here."

John Shivas, Assistant Head, Armed Forces Covenant Team, Ministry of Defence, provided an update on the Covenant from the MOD. He said: "We have aimed the Covenant at local level rather than central government because it's there where the disparity exists. We want to make sure you have the information you need and is best for your local area."

During the workshop groups of guests were asked to discuss questions around the unique challenges we face in Northern Ireland around the implementation of the Covenant. We are grateful to everyone who took part fed back to the audience. Your views on this issue are vital in taking policy forward, and having an impact on the ground.

Pictured, left: Tom McBarnet, Chief Executive of the Forces in Mind Trust, Liz Brown, Head of the Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office, Mike Murdoch, Chief Executive of the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association Northern Ireland.







## What is the new Armed Forces Covenant Duty?

The new Covenant Duty is a legal obligation on certain public bodies to 'have due regard' to the principles of the Covenant, and requires decisions about the development and delivery of certain services to be made with conscious consideration of the needs of the Armed Forces community.

## Upcoming webinar on the Armed Forces Covenant Duty

In conjunction with the MOD we will be rolling out a series of webinars to better educate and inform public bodies about their obligations under the Armed Forces Covenant. Keep an eye on our website for updates.



- The full report *A Decade of the Covenant* is available to read [here](#)
- A toolkit to support information in the report is available [here](#)
- Further information about the Armed Forces Covenant Duty can be found [here](#)





# New Women Veterans' Strategy to Look at Experiences of Former Female Service Personnel

The Office for Veterans Affairs (OVA) has announced its intention to release a Women Veterans' Strategy. This much-anticipated strategy aims to recognise and address the specific needs and challenges faced by female veterans, as well as to celebrate their incredible successes.

Through the strategy, the Government will tackle areas where women veterans might be missing out on support, as well as any accessibility issues, within the wide variety of services already being delivered for the veteran community.

As well as our female veterans living in Northern Ireland, there are more than 235,000 women in England and Wales who have proudly served in our Armed Forces. However, women veterans have been reported to face issues accessing support services, particularly where those services are inadvertently orientated towards men. The OVA's upcoming Women Veterans' Strategy will provide a comprehensive framework to tackle these accessibility issues head-on. By working with experts in academia, charities, and other government departments, the OVA plans to cover crucial areas such as mental health support, physical welfare, and employment.

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Johnny Mercer said: "Making this country the best place in the world to be a veteran shouldn't just be something we say, but something we do. In order to deliver this ambition, it's vital that we listen to women veterans, celebrate their successes, and deliver the support they need. That's what the new Women Veterans' Strategy will do."

The OVA plans to publish the Women Veterans' Strategy later this year. In developing the strategy the OVA will outline what support is already being delivered across the UK and what more may need to be done, both by the Government and across wider support services. To ensure the strategy's success, the OVA has already commissioned research into the accessibility of services available to women veterans, with recommendations due back this summer.

The OVA is already engaged, through the recently announced Veterans Health Innovation Fund, with a number of projects looking to understand the specific needs of women veterans. The OVA is already engaged, through the recently announced Veterans Health Innovation Fund, with a number of projects looking to understand the specific needs of women veterans. The Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Office will be fully involved with this research, taking the lead alongside members of the Serving and Ex Serving Women's Network (SESWN). So far, consultations run by the SESWN have told us that a female peer network is long overdue and much needed here in Northern Ireland.



Here in Northern Ireland, we have been working alongside some of our most inspiring female colleagues from across the veteran support network, and we are bringing events to you online and in person to help build a support system to ensure that no serving or ex serving woman struggles within her personal or professional community.

Serving and ex serving women from across Northern Ireland are invited to join us for the official launch of the Network in May, at a free reception on board the HMS Caroline. We are thrilled to have RAF veteran Liz McConaghy aka Chinook Crew Chick as our special guest speaker at this event.



If you would like to attend,  
RSVP by emailing [ni-vsocomms@rfca.org.uk](mailto:ni-vsocomms@rfca.org.uk)  
or tel: 028 9521 6784

Visit [www.seswn.co.uk](http://www.seswn.co.uk) for more information  
and to stay up to date with the network!





# Cold Water Warrior: Overcoming Addiction and PTSD with Cold Water Therapy

**Last month we met up with the Cold Water Warrior, aka Anthony McToal, to hear how cold water immersion therapy and sea swimming has helped him in his journey towards overcoming PTSD and addiction.**

Anthony is a 31 year old veteran who served with the 1st Battalion Royal Irish. He was in the army for four years and was deployed to Afghanistan as part of Operation Herrick 13 from 2009-2010. But after leaving the army, Anthony experienced horrific flashbacks from his time in Afghanistan, and started to use alcohol and drugs to cope. “I suffered from PTSD and became a recluse at one point. I struggled with addiction for 12 years but eventually weaned myself off. I didn’t know where help was, I had to help myself.”



"Break off your shackles  
for society, you don't  
start living until you  
start doing things."  
ANTHONY MCTOAL

After going to his GP last year, getting support from his community mental health team and other charities such as Inspire, Combat Stress and WAVE Trauma Centre, Anthony was diagnosed with PTSD. But not wanting to rely solely on medication for his illness, Anthony said: “I needed something that was going to help in a holistic way, I didn’t want to be on drugs all the time.”

It was around that time his friend, Gary, persuaded Anthony to join him to a cold water swim at Ballygally Beach. “I had no choice the first day, I had to just get in quick. I ran in up to my chest then realised I was in the water. Gary helped me to adjust to the cold and once my breathing calmed, I noticed how nice it was and found myself smiling uncontrollably. I hadn’t been in for a long time, but it lifted me for the whole day. My partner couldn’t get over how happy I was.”

Explaining how living with PTSD affected him, Anthony said: “I call it a fog with PTSD. I was always watching, keeping on edge of everything. I know there’s so many people out there going through crap every day. But getting in the sea is the complete opposite of that and gets you out of the house.”

Since that first dip in December last year, Anthony has set up a peer support group that gathers every day without fail for a sea swim. Keen to move away from stereotypes, he explained that the group is open to everyone: “We’re not cross-community, we’re every community. Come out here and stay positive. Break off your shackles for society, you don’t start living until you start doing things. I now have an opportunity to help people and deliver them to services that helped me because the hardest thing is finding where to go.”

**You can watch Anthony tell his personal story in [this](#) video.**





# Updates from the Northern Ireland Veterans' Commissioner

**2023 has been as busy as ever for the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner, Danny Kinahan, who remains committed to championing the needs of veterans living in Northern Ireland. Here Danny shares with us what's events have taken place this year until now.**



*So far this year we have conducted three Veterans Information Roadshows, in Londonderry, Carrickfergus and Belfast whilst supporting the Veteran Champions 'Drop In' event in Kilkeel, as well as several other Veteran Champions' Veterans Breakfasts. During these engagements we remain aware of the mental health and wellbeing challenges and concerns of many veterans. As such the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office has sponsored and facilitated three Mental Health and Suicide prevention courses, specifically developed for veterans, in Cookstown, Cullybackey and Tandragee, with a further two planned for Lisburn and Limavady.*

*Should you wish to attend any of these Mental Health and Suicide prevention courses you can register via the NIVCO website, by clicking the Register for Events button on the home page: [www.nivco.co.uk](http://www.nivco.co.uk)*



**Attending Irish Guards St Patricks day presentation of Shamrock 2023**

*In February the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office hosted and coordinated the UK Veterans Commissioners' and Veteran Health Partnership to ensure collaborative working and solution led focus, to issues facing veterans across the UK. This continues to be a priority area for the Veterans Commissioner in ensuring where possible, Northern Ireland Veterans are not disadvantaged compared to their Great Britain veteran counterparts.*

*As of the 1st April 2023 the UDR and R IRISH Aftercare Service will have merged with Veterans UK to become Veterans Welfare Service NI, who will extend their services to include veterans of all cap badges and services. This is aimed at providing a singular and more accessible welfare pathway to all veterans living in Northern Ireland, something that has been an area of concern raised during engagements the Commissioner has had with veterans over the past number of years. There are still far too many veterans who do not know where to go when they are in need, and it is hoped that all veterans, regardless of background or cap badge, will be able to access the same support services across NI in a more simplified and timely manner. While the current system is still not perfect, it is hoped that veteran service reform over the coming months and years will ensure that every veteran receives the help, advice and guidance when they need it.*



**Presentation of cheque to service charity Blesma March 2023**



# Updates from the Northern Ireland Veterans' Commissioner



Attending Irish Guards St Patricks day presentation of Shamrock 2023



Ex service Persons Employment Event - April 2023

Recognition of service and the positive contributions that servicemen and women brought to ensure a peaceful and stable Northern Ireland, continue to be another focus for the Veterans Commissioner in 2023. This year celebrates 50 years since the formation of the UDR Greenfinches (female support to the Ulster Defence Regiment during Op Banner) and consequently 50 years since women were first allowed formally to partake in military operations. This significant milestone is being recognised this summer and as part of that the Veteran Commissioner's Office will host a special Afternoon Tea event at Hillsborough Castle and Gardens in recognition of this historical moment. This event has been well received within the Greenfinch community and has already reached capacity.

Building upon the veteran narrative, and following the success of the 'We Will Remember' exhibition that was conducted by the Northern Ireland Veteran Commissioner's Office last November, we are working on a similar, but more permanent and mobile exhibition. It is envisaged that the exhibition will travel throughout NI to tell the stories of those who served in the protection of society during the 'Troubles'. For so long veterans have not had a voice in which they could advocate for the terrorist acts they prevented, and the lives that were saved because of their courage and dedication. It is with pride and recognition that the Northern Ireland Veteran Commissioner's Office are assisting and facilitating this project which will launch in the Autumn.

We will continue our work in reaching out into the veteran community within Northern Ireland and will persist in the assistance of veterans as best we can.

*If you would like to keep up to date with the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner please follow us on Twitter @niveteranscomm*

*or Facebook @NorthernIrelandVeterans Commissioner*



Veteran Mental Health training - Cookstown - January 2023



# A Drive Down Memory Lane for Ex-RCT Veterans Visiting Thiepval

**Our DMWS Veterans and Families Welfare Officer, Brian Williams (ex-Royal Corps of Transport), recently welcomed a group of RCT veterans and family members to Thiepval Barracks. Brian shares his account of the visit below.**

*On Saturday 4th March Thiepval Barracks hosted a delegation of veterans; most of which had travelled over from UK mainland. These service personnel (many with wives) served in the Royal Corps of Transport (RCT) during the 60s, 70s and 80s. Many of these ex-soldiers had not been back to Northern Ireland since completing their tours of duty.*

*On completion of the tour the delegation held a short act of remembrance and laid a wreath at the garrison remembrance garden, where one of the group said a few words.*

*The visit was rounded off with sausage and bacon baps, along with tea and coffee in the Garrison WOs and Sgts Mess.*

*During the visit the veterans got a tour of the camp, revisiting old haunts such as accommodation blocks, troop lines, NAAFI, even the gym. Familiar old buildings like HQNI, Sandhurst Block, the Armoury and the Officer's Mess brought back memories and initiated stories being recounted.*

*Near HQNI in a quiet area of the camp the tour paused at a small garden of remembrance dedicated to those security and intelligence officers who lost their lives, along with four RAF crew, on Chinook ZD576 when it crashed into the Mull of Kintyre on 2nd June 1994 killing all onboard.*

*Talking to the veterans later that evening they'd had a brilliant time and the visit to the camp had been the absolute highlight of the trip.*

*Two of the veterans attending had been caught up in the bombs in 1996, and the opportunity for them to safely revisit that space with supportive friends who understood, proved to be invaluable in addressing some of the demons of those darker days.*



Members of the ex-Royal Corps of Transport reunited in Thiepval Barracks in March



This memorial honours those who lost their lives in the Mull of Kintyre crash



The group laid a wreath in the garden of Remembrance, dedicated to security and intelligence officers who have died during service

## Quick History Lesson

- The army took over Magheralave House, Lisburn in 1938 and HQNI was born.
- In 1940 Thiepval Barracks was built to support HQNI and it became the home to 39th Infantry Brigade and HQ Ulster Defence Regiment. Back then the resident transport unit providing transport and logistical support to the garrison was 26 Coy RASC (Royal Army Service Corps). In 1963 the transport element of the army was restructured resulting in the passing of the RASC and the birth of a new corps: the RCT (Royal Corps of Transport). 26 Coy RASC became 26 Sqn RCT.
- When the Troubles broke out the resident transport unit needed to be increased due to the increased workload in theatre. In 1971 - 18 Amphibious Sqn RCT sent their MT section to Northern Ireland to reinforce 26 Sqn RCT. During this period the unit's name was 18/26 Sqn RCT.
- In 1977 - 18 Amph Sqn RCT was disbanded and by 1978 all elements of their MT section had now been fully integrated and the unit reverted back to 26 Sqn RCT. In 1992, 21 (Northern Ireland) Transport and Movements Regiment RCT was formed of which 26 Sqn RCT was an integral part. Now, rather than being an independent squadron we became part of a larger regimental structure. I'm sure in no small way a reflection of the increased manpower and the units operational tasking and commitments.
- In 1993 another restructuring of the army resulted in the passing of the RCT and the birth of another new corps, the RLC (Royal Logistic Corps). This meant 26 Sqn RCT became 26 Transport Sqn RLC.



# Reviving a Village with Harbour House: Beyond the Battlefield's Mission to Serve Veterans and the Community



**At the end of 2022, Beyond the Battlefield opened Harbour House, a veteran's centre located in the tranquil fishing village of Portavogie, on the Ards Peninsula. The centre has accommodation for veterans in need, a bespoke café, carvery restaurant and facilities for outwards bounds activities.**



Pictured from left: Beyond the Battlefield Chairman Robert McCartney, Chief Executive Annemarie Hastings, NIVSO Veterans' Champion Support Officer, Bobby Gillespie

We spoke with Annemarie Hastings, Chief Executive of Beyond the Battlefield, to learn about the centre's progress and hear how the small, dedicated team overcame challenges to get Harbour House up and running for the veteran community.

"It's difficult to come into any village and say, 'We're putting in a veteran's centre here.' We engaged with the local people, community groups, heritage groups, even the football team to get it right," Annemarie explained.

Although the building had been derelict for nearly five years, Beyond the Battlefield recognised its potential and decided to undertake the project, fully aware of the difficulties and obstacles they would face. Nevertheless, with determination, dedication, hard labour and the assistance of volunteers, they successfully completed the building renovations.

Rooted in sustainability, charity, and community, the centre reflects a thoughtful approach to each space. In the restaurant, a feature wall is decorated in wood cladding from old pallets. Throughout the building, donated furniture has been upcycled and reupholstered to make it new again. The residential spaces have underfloor heating and individual thermostats, ample storage and spacious, modern en suite bathrooms. Obtained through a grant, solar panels on the outside of the building make the most of the Portavogie sunshine, saving up to 50% energy costs to run the building.



The main priority for the centre is to provide a safe haven for veterans experiencing homelessness. Annemarie shared with us the story of an older veteran who recently stayed at the centre. “Age doesn’t matter if someone is in need. It’s harrowing and humbling to think becoming homeless could happen when you are coming up on 70. Anyone could end up in this situation. It’s a lesson to us all – keep your feet on the ground.”

Annemarie described how the safe environment of Harbour House helped the veteran feel at ease while they were supported with counselling during their stay. The veteran helped out with their own housekeeping and laundry, which gave them “that little bit of purpose” in their day-to-day, improved their self-esteem and helped them to connect with staff and other residents.



*“It’s so tranquil down here, and there is so much to be achieved.” Annemarie Hastings, Beyond the Battlefield Chief Executive*

With the help of the centre’s counselling services, the veteran was able to transition back to living with their family and is now doing well. This experience exemplifies the positive impact that dedicated support and a safe environment can have on the lives of those in need.

Harbour House has not only provided a safe haven for homeless veterans but has also had a positive impact on the wider community. Everyday veterans come in to support the venue. One local resident told Beyond the Battlefield: “You’ve changed my life by even opening the café.”

As well as offering up a daily lunchtime and evening menu for patrons, many Associations, local groups and clubs all use the centre space to hold meetings and community events.

For more information, get in touch with Beyond the Battlefield.  
**Email:** [info@beyondthebattlefield.org](mailto:info@beyondthebattlefield.org) or call **028 9122 8389**





# Progress Through Scuba Diving: Supporting Veterans with PTSD



Guest feature provided by  
the Trustees of Progress  
Through Scuba Diving

## BACKGROUND

In 2019, a group of veterans established PTSD - Progress Through Scuba Diving, a non-profit charity that operates solely on donations. Kevin James, the Director of Diving Operations, discovered a medical study by The John Hopkins University that explored the advantages of scuba diving for wounded veterans. The study uncovered that scuba diving can increase serotonin levels in the body, which is scientifically proven to alleviate symptoms of PTSD. With this knowledge in mind, Progress Through Scuba Diving was formed.

## ISSUE

Veterans who suffer from PTSD but have no physical injuries often hesitate to seek help, as they perceive those with physical injuries as having higher priority. Even when they do seek assistance, they are typically referred to other charities that specialize in providing support to individuals dealing with PTSD but may not get the closure they need.

## CONTEXT

As Trustees, we are constantly seeking to identify individuals who may benefit from the Charity's activities. Whilst one of the Trustees, who was Serving, was chatting to a friend on the Friday closedown routine, Richard Armstrong, a Veteran of the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Regiment, came into conversation when discussing what their weekend was looking like. It was at this point that our Charity, 'Progress Through Scuba Diving' was mentioned and suggested that if Richard was willing, would he be interested in coming forward as a candidate for help. Here is his story:

## EXPERIENCE

*I felt like I was in a dark crevasse with no way out and I no longer wanted to be here. I'd exhausted every avenue looking for help and was now sectioned within an NHS Mental Health ward, feeling like no one understood what I was going through or even cared. In my mind I was planning the inevitable for when I was released. A friend had chatted to someone at work and signposted Progress Through Scuba Diving to me and asked would I be interested. I had nothing to lose and therefore said yes.*

*One of the Trustees, Magi, reached out to start the communications to enable me to go forward, which also included the comment I would need to do a try dive prior to going onto the course. As a non-swimmer with zero scuba diving experience, I was nervous of how this would go but I was out of options and this was "ride or die" for me, if I didn't give it my all I knew this would be it for me, I had no fight left in me. The day of my try dive I agreed to meet up beforehand and have a chat - I remember feeling intense and nervous, like I was going for an interview where I would be judged, and I needed to justify why I was asking for their help. But they let me talk and didn't hesitate with an offer to have me on a course, explaining the whole process and talking me through the next steps. I didn't really care, I just wanted to get better and was willing to try anything. The try dive went well, Jim was very understanding of my anxiety in the water and was extremely patient with me. I left knowing I'd be heading over for their course in the matter of weeks.*

*My first dive with Kevin began the day I arrived, and I immediately realised there was a huge difference from swimming pool to what felt like a deep ocean. Thankfully my training with Jim kicked in and the dive went better than expected. The first week was very intense, diving twice daily but being involved with the planning gave me the control I needed to push myself. The week was filled with both highs and lows, but I was able to talk through them and realise my PTSD was a battle within my mind and it was a battle I wanted to win! The turning point for me was during a conversation with Jim where he said I needed to: "Stop treating this as an exercise and begin to think of it as adventure training, allow yourself to enjoy the full experience. Take in your surroundings and let the positive feelings in." Each dive began to feel like a sense of achievement for me, the brain fog started to lift and my mind began to open up again. I felt more relaxed, completely, and was no longer dwelling on the past.*

*This course changed my life. I'm happy, my mind is in the best place it has ever been and I've started to love myself again but most of all I actually appreciate being alive now.*

## SUMMARY

In Richard's words, he had tried everything and by chance, was signposted to Progress Through Scuba Diving. Richard is the 9th British veteran who has suffered with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to have attended our course and come away with the brain fog lifted. Such was the transformation in appearance, personality and outlook, individuals who had been working with him prior to the dives barely recognised him when he helped out at a Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Roadshow. This is what success looks like.

As a Charity we will continue to raise funds through donations and fundraising events to make sure that the next sufferer of PTSD has the opportunity to live their best life. Our Trustees will continue to seek grants to enable this activity and in time hope to apply to COBSEO as a member. Our website can be found at [www.ptsdscuba.co.uk](http://www.ptsdscuba.co.uk)





Friday 5th May

Tea Dance: Aurora Leisure Centre,  
Bangor (2-4pm)  
Queen's Hall Newtownards (2-4pm)  
Call 0300 013 3333 to book

Friday 5th May

King's Coronation Tea Dance  
Royal British Legion Waterside  
Branch, Londonderry  
2-5pm  
No booking required

Saturday 6th May

King's Coronation Tea Party  
Royal British Legion Ballynahinch  
from 10.30am, free  
Email: ballynahinchrbl@gmail.com  
to book a space

Sunday 7th May

Coronation Celebration in Carrowdore  
Carrowdore Community Centre  
1.30pm  
BBQ, family picnic, bouncy castles



Community groups across  
Northern Ireland  
invite you to celebrate the  
Coronation of Their Majesties King  
Charles III and Queen Camilla

Monday 8th May

Ballynahinch Vintage Classic &  
Retro Vehicle Static Display  
Ballynahinch Baptist Church  
10am - 2pm  
£5 charitable donation entry fee  
per vehicle

Monday 8th May

The Big Community Paddle, Picnic  
and Volunteer Village  
Enniskillen Castle, Fermanagh  
11am - 5pm  
No booking required

Monday 8th May

King's Coronation Street Tattoo  
Greencastle Street, Kilkeel  
7.30pm  
Fireworks, beacon and gun salute

Link in with your local Association,  
Legion Club or Branch, to find out  
what's happening in your area to  
celebrate the Coronation!



# Changing the Narrative: Breaking Stigma and Empowering Veterans into Employment in Northern Ireland

**Events organiser and founder of the Northern Ireland Veterans Awards, Jason Gillard, is running a networking and employment fair for veterans in June!**

This free event will take place in Belfast's Europa Hotel, and will have up to 70 businesses on hand to offer advice and information on local employment opportunities. Whether you're actively job hunting or simply researching the job market, you'll have the chance to explore potential job opportunities and learn about different organisations you might like to work for in the future. Most importantly, you'll get to meet face-to-face with employers who recognise the unique abilities and experiences that veterans bring to the table.

There will be a diverse range of companies at this event, including small regional organisations and large multinationals across various industry sectors with vacancies in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Additionally, there will be a line-up of guest speakers who will be sharing their insights throughout the event. This event is open to service leavers, veterans, and their families.

You can book your free ticket to attend through Event Brite: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/veterans-networking-employment-fair-tickets-597793164447>

Contact Jason directly for any queries. Email: [info@veteransawardsni.com](mailto:info@veteransawardsni.com)



For the last 20 years veterans have not had the same access to support for employment and networking as our counterparts in the mainland UK. So I want to change that by changing the narrative and stigma associated around employing a veteran. Now that companies are seeing the positives and skills veterans and services leavers bring it was only right to bring those two elements together.

”

**JASON GILLARD**

**Organiser, Veterans Networking & Employment Fair, and founder of the Veterans Awards Northern Ireland**



# From Service to Success: How the Forces Employment Charity Supports Veterans in Their Careers

The Forces Employment Charity supports military veterans, reservists, and their families with training and employment opportunities after leaving service. With a history dating back to 1885, the charity has a long-standing legacy of providing support and opportunities to individuals who have dedicated their lives to service.

The charity's primary goal is to help service leavers transition to civilian life by providing job opportunities, training, and ongoing support. This includes helping veterans find employment in a wide range of industries, as well as offering advice and guidance on everything from career development to mental health and wellbeing.

One of the most important aspects of the Forces Employment Charity's work is its commitment to inclusivity. They provide support to all veterans and their families, regardless of rank, length of service, or reason for leaving the military. This means that everyone who has served has access to the charity's valuable resources and expertise.

In addition to its core services, the Forces Employment Charity works in partnership with other organizations and employers to create a network of support throughout the UK, and they are an important member of the Northern Ireland Veterans' Support Committee.

They are helping to bridge the gap between military life and civilian employment, and ensure that everyone who has served their country has the resources they need to succeed.



To speak with Alana, the Northern Ireland Regional Employment Advisor, phone 07805725242

**Find out more and connect online for up to date news, information and job opportunities!**

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

[www.twitter.com/forcesemploy](https://www.twitter.com/forcesemploy)

[www.facebook.com/ForcesEmploymentCharity](https://www.facebook.com/ForcesEmploymentCharity)

[www.linkedin.com/company/forces-employment-charity](https://www.linkedin.com/company/forces-employment-charity)

[www.instagram.com/forcesemploymentcharity](https://www.instagram.com/forcesemploymentcharity)



Scan the QR code to visit the Forces Employment Charity website!



# Northern Ireland's Veterans' Champions Bring Communities Together



**A series of Veterans in the Community events have taken place throughout Northern Ireland, bringing veterans and families together in conjunction with their local Veterans' Champion.**

From Carrickfergus to Kilkeel, Newtownards to Lisburn, we have been busy coordinating with Veterans' Champions in every council area throughout the province to run free events for veterans and their families.

So far events have taken place in Mid & East Antrim, Antrim & Newtownabbey, Mid Ulster, Ards & North Down, Newry, Mourne & Down and Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council. Every event has been unique, some have had guest speakers, drop-in counselling clinics and local veteran support organisations on hand to talk about their work.

Speaking at his event in the Newtownards Royal British Legion, Veterans' Champion for Ards and North Down, Councillor Trevor Cummings, said: "We need to connect in with you and make a relationship with you. We are here to support the initiatives that are going on here in Ards and North Down, and we want to encourage you to get together and take part."

**There was a fantastic show of support from the local community at the Veterans in the Community event in Kilkeel, hosted by Veterans' Champion in Newry, Mourne and Down, Councillor Henry Reilly**



**Over 130 veterans and their families attended an event in Carrickfergus, hosted by Veterans' Champion in Mid and East Antrim, Alderman Billy Ashe**



**Veterans from the Armed Forces Bikers group enjoyed breakfast and a brew at an event in Lisburn hosted by Veterans' Champion for Lisburn and Castlereagh, Alderman James Tinsley**



**Mr & Mrs Cunningham from the Newtownards RUCGC Association were recognised for their support and fundraising for the Poppy Appeal during an event hosted by Veterans' Champion for Ards and North Down, Councillor Trevor Cummings**



Testament to the success of the events so far, is feedback from harder to reach veterans who have been in attendance. One guest said: "I left service in 2007 and this is the first event I have ever attended. Thank you for supporting us."

At an event in Kilkeel, Veterans' Champion in Newry, Mourne and Down, Councillor Henry Reilly hosted guests and an array of speakers from the veteran support network, including Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner, Danny Kinahan, the Veterans' Adviceline for Statutory Professionals (VASP) Project Manager, Mark Ewing, and Mental Health trainer Alison Campbell from Rainbow Bright Training. Information and advice for veterans and their families was also on hand from many organisations in the room, including Andy Allen Veterans Support, The Schomberg Society and the Royal British Legion.

These events are funded through the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust as part of a wider programme to support Veterans' Champions across Northern Ireland, enabling them to reach you in the heart of your community.



**Veterans' Champion for Mid Ulster, Councillor Mark Glasgow, welcomed veterans to his breakfast event in March**



**Irish Guards Veteran, Bryan Phillips, who was injured while on duty in Afghanistan, gave a hugely inspiring talk to guests at an event in Carrickfergus, hosted by Veterans' Champion for Mid and East Antrim, Alderman Billy Ashe**



**If you would like to find out more, or enquire about an event in your area, contact our Veterans' Champions Support Officer, Bobby.  
Email: [vcspofficer@nivso.org.uk](mailto:vcspofficer@nivso.org.uk) or telephone: 07546710977**



**Veterans' Champion for Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, Alderman James Tinsley, is pictured alongside guests at his event in April**





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