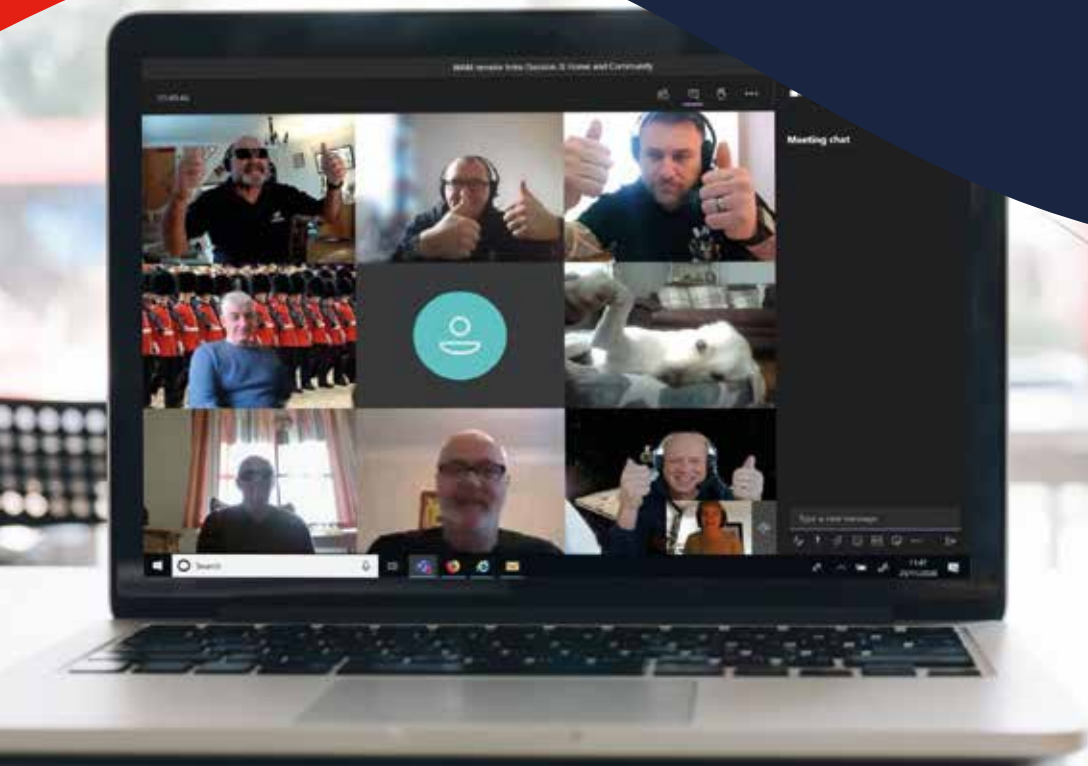




Rebuilding  
lives after  
sight loss

# Debrief

Your impact on the lives of blind veterans  
WINTER 2020



## Connected because of you

### INSIDE:

- p.4** Find out how our veterans are keeping in touch
- p.8** See how you made Remembrance Day possible
- p.17** Could you become a befriender?

# Welcome

**Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB**  
**CEO, Blind Veterans UK**



**Happy New Year from everyone here at Blind Veterans UK.**

I'd like to welcome you to your winter edition of Debrief with some good news. Thanks to supporters like you, over the past few months, despite the pandemic, we've still been able to reach our veterans with the support which transforms their lives.

**By donating, fundraising, volunteering and taking part in our lottery and Superdraws, you have made it possible for us to equip the veterans with sight loss technology, such as specially adapted mobile phones and laptops.**

This has enabled us to bring our services into their homes.

**Providing technology is just the beginning of the story, veterans then need the training to use it.** With our centres closed, all training has had to be done remotely. As you can imagine, this can be very challenging and requires lots of ongoing support.

**But, thanks to your kindness and generosity, the determination of our veterans and the dedication of our IT instructors, all the hard work has paid off.** You'll see Zoom calls, online creative classes, virtual music groups and remote crafting sessions leaping from every page of this Debrief!

**On pages eight and nine** you can read how you helped our veterans to still 'come together' for Remembrance Day and **on page 12** see how an online photography group is saving a group of blind veterans from isolation.

None of these, quite frankly astounding, achievements would have been possible without you. All I can say is **'thank you'** to each and every one of you.

Take care,

## Inside for you

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## 2020 at a glance



# 93%

From an independent survey of all our beneficiaries this year, the charity achieved a satisfaction score known as a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 93 out of a possible 100. This is considered 'World Class'.



# 6,881

This year our casework specialists completed 6,881 assessments with all the beneficiaries.



# 85%

This year 85% of beneficiaries maintained or saw an improvement in their ability to realise life beyond sight loss.

# 917

We welcomed 917 new beneficiaries into our family.

# 84p

in every £1 is spent on our charitable activities

# Connected because of you

For many of our veterans, the last nine months have been exceptionally challenging. But, with the help of supporters like you, we have been able to respond to the pandemic quickly and give our veterans the best possible care.

In April 2020, we established the **National Support Service (NSS)**. The first phase of the service focused on emergency care. Day in, day out, our teams across the country delivered food parcels and medication to those in isolation and gave them all the practical and emotional support they needed. **Your support was genuinely lifesaving and we have been struck by the number of blind veterans who have regarded us as their lifeline during this turbulent time.**

In response to the continuing social distancing measures and restrictions, we then launched the second phase of

our NSS, which focuses on **health, wellbeing and rehabilitation** during the pandemic. It focuses on providing technology and training veterans on how to use it, so they can still connect to our services, support workers, volunteers and the whole blind veterans community.

The project is being delivered two fold, virtually and through socially distanced support visits from our community support team. The aim is to provide continued support and, crucially, reduce the impacts of social isolation.

**Thank you for helping us to make sure that no blind veteran has to face the challenges of the pandemic alone.**

## Can you help?

As the pandemic continues, we need funds to keep our National Support Service going, to save 4,700 veterans from isolation. A donation of £15 could cover the cost of a Microsoft Teams license for a veteran, so they can have a video call online.



Frank with his newly-sanded table and chairs

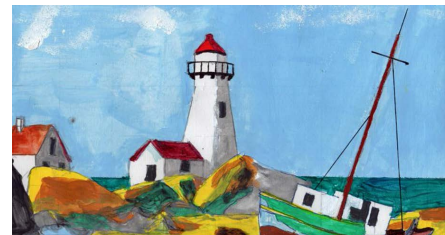
## Busier than ever

It's so inspiring to see our blind veterans keeping busy during the pandemic. **81-year-old blind veteran Frank**, who we have supported since 2013, is part of a ukulele group, made up of him and 11 others, who join a weekly Zoom call. These calls are a great opportunity for members of the group to play, sing and catch up.

Frank has also been busy in the garden, building a greenhouse, growing vegetables and sanding down a pine table and chairs for his granddaughter. When he's not busy being creative, he's walking his guide dog Sissy.

Frank isn't alone – launched in September last year, the **National Creative Project** is our new initiative to get our veterans involved with activities from home. From gardening and painting to virtual chats with others who share the same hobbies, our veterans are joining in from all over the country.

**Find out more about the National Creative Project at [blindveterans.org.uk/ncp](https://blindveterans.org.uk/ncp)**



A contribution to our National Creative Project





# No longer lonely thanks to you

Blind Veteran, Ron Zapple, wants to say a huge thank you for making it possible for him to be trained to use a specially adapted smartphone during lockdown. He was able to stay in touch with the outside world, and it's all thanks to you.

86-year-old Ron Zapple attended one of our training and rehabilitation weeks in Western-super-Mare last year, where he saw other blind veterans using their Synapptic smartphones. He says:  
"I heard how great these little devices

were for keeping in touch with family and getting online, even when severely sight impaired. So I requested one and Blind Veterans UK kindly got one for me."



Ron underwent some initial basic training but couldn't quite follow it and struggled for some time. Then lockdown happened, making already isolated, sight-impaired people across the UK more isolated than ever before.

**Ron got in touch with his support worker, who arranged some one-to-one training over the phone with Technology Practitioner Dan.** Following a weekly training schedule, Ron was able to use his Synapptic phone to text and email his family and friends. He also learned to search the internet and listen to the radio, keeping him fully connected with the outside world.

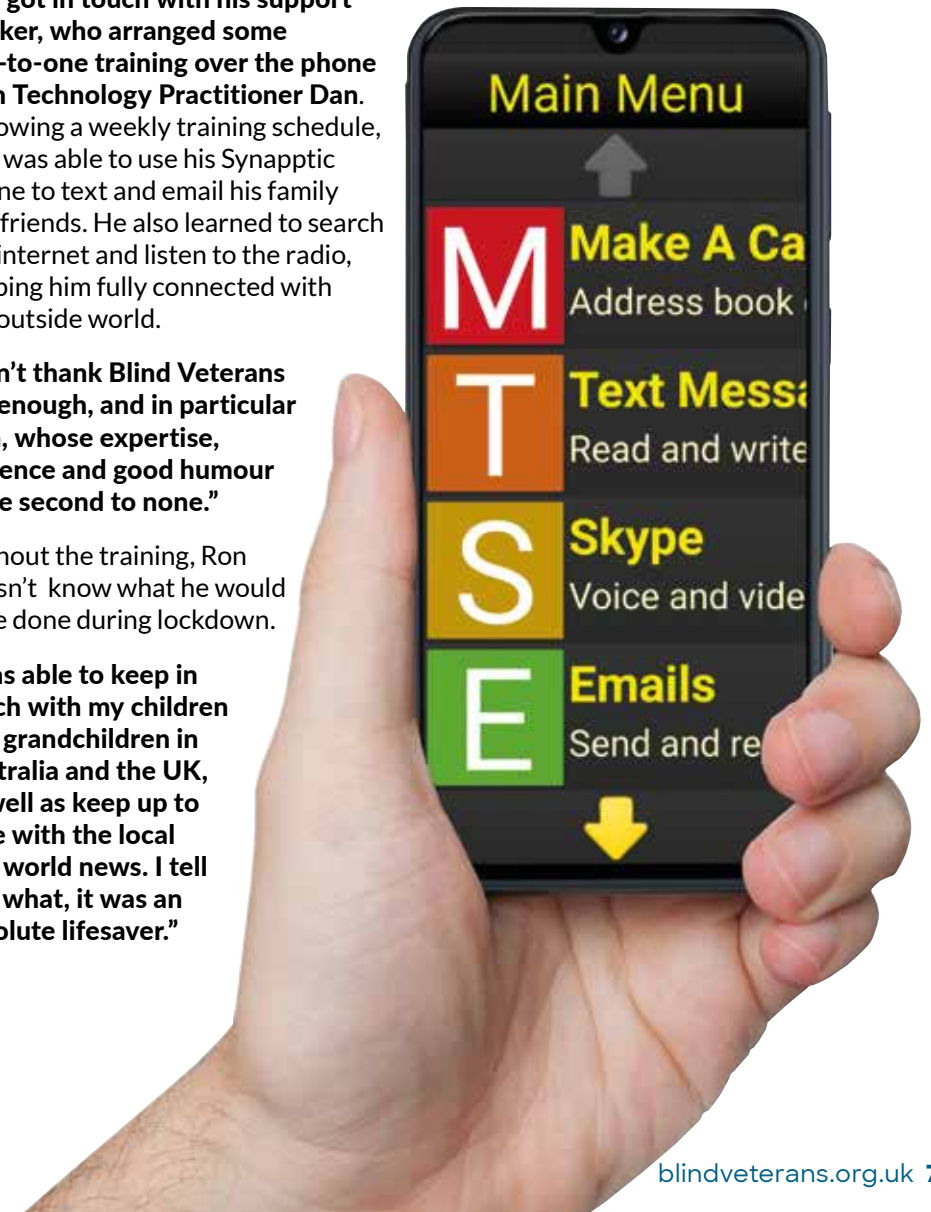
**"I can't thank Blind Veterans UK enough, and in particular Dan, whose expertise, patience and good humour were second to none."**

Without the training, Ron doesn't know what he would have done during lockdown.

**"I was able to keep in touch with my children and grandchildren in Australia and the UK, as well as keep up to date with the local and world news. I tell you what, it was an absolute lifesaver."**

**This is how your support is helping during the ongoing pandemic.**

**Thank you!**



# Thank you for helping our veterans to remember



Every year, at the 11th hour, on the 11th day, of the 11th month, we stand still and silent to remember those who went to war and never came home. Thanks to supporters like you donating to our Remembrance Day appeal, despite the pandemic, our veterans could still 'join together' in an act of remembrance.

This year, on what was the **75th Remembrance Day since the end of World War II**, because of the pandemic, things had to be very different to usual. We saw wreath bearers marching alone and many people marked the occasion at home, rather than at their local war memorial.

**For the first time ever, we couldn't take our Blind Veterans UK contingent of over 100 men and women to march with pride past The Cenotaph.** But, thanks to your kind donations, which provided special sight loss technology and training, veterans got together virtually online for 'listen and join in parties'. These are the stories of just some of the veterans who took part.

**Margaret Wilson**  
**Women's Auxiliary Air Force**  
**Codebreaker at Bletchley Park**

"It's very disappointing that I couldn't march this year but I did understand why it couldn't happen. I joined other blind

veterans from my area on Armistice Day for a group call, which was lovely. **We need to get rid of this virus so that I can march again next year.** I will be 98 then but, all being well, I'll be there!"

**David Tutt**  
**London Rifle Brigade**  
**Territorial Army**

"I was absolutely gutted when I heard I was losing my sight. **I don't think I can praise Blind Veterans UK any higher.** That tablet they have given me has been great. I was not really an IT person before but now I'm using it for all sorts.

Remembrance means an awful lot to me. We have to recognise what people selflessly went through for us. **I will be remembering all those members of the armed forces who made the ultimate sacrifice.** Although I couldn't get to The Cenotaph this year, I stood alongside my neighbours on our doorsteps in remembrance."

**Tony Harbour**  
**Royal Air Force (RAF) Police Force**

"Blind Veterans UK are fantastic. **Even during this awful pandemic my Community Support Worker has been calling me on a weekly basis to make sure I'm fine and have everything I need.** It's a brilliant feeling knowing that they're always only a phone call away, no matter what happens.

Remembrance is a very special time of year for me. **My father fought in the First World War and I wear his medals with pride on Remembrance Sunday.** This year, I particularly remembered my fellow blind veteran Ron Freer, who sadly passed away at the age of 104. I'd known him for over 30 years through the charity. He was like a brother to me. It's very sad not to be able to go to London but I'll be sat at home watching on TV with a photo of Ron."

**John Hodges**  
**Royal Army Service Corps**

"During lockdown Blind Veterans UK have done an amazing job of keeping us all connected during a period of social isolation. **On the first Friday of every month we have a group phone call with the blind veterans who would usually meet up at our local lunch club.** It's been brilliant, not only for the companionship, but also for sharing local information between people in similar situations during this difficult time."

**In a difficult year, in which many veterans have been shielding and have had to cope with their sight loss – without the face-to-face support they rely on – they needed Remembrance Day more than ever. Thank you for making it possible.**

Margaret Wilson



David Tutt



Tony Harbour



John Hodges





# Keep calm and sew on

A grandmother from Telscombe Cliffs in Brighton sewed and sold hundreds of masks during lockdown, and has very generously made a donation to help our veterans.

Jan Wilks got involved in the project when a friend found out that we were short of PPE at our training and rehabilitation centre in Ovingdean. She says: **"We knew the care staff and blind veterans needed masks so three of us got together and made 30."**

It made Jan feel great and she really enjoyed it, so she decided to start making more using the material she had in her drawers. She gave them out to friends word got round. Then, her local hardware store, Handy Hardware in Rottingdean, offered to sell them in their shop for charity.

**"I made a batch and low and behold they quickly sold out. A few batches later and they had sold over 200! I still can't quite believe it. We made a total of £1,000 which will be split between two local charities, Blind Veterans UK and the Brighton Macmillan Coastal Garden Trail."**

Jan used to live in Ovingdean so Blind Veterans UK have been part of her life for over 40 years. **"I used to have a sewing shop in Rottingdean and it was popular with blind veterans' wives when they came on holidays at the rehabilitation centre."**

**"I'm so pleased I decided to get involved with this project. It was so lovely to do something for a good cause while I was stuck inside during lockdown."**



## Here's to all our volunteers

While our training and rehabilitation centre has been closed due to the pandemic, a local befriender has gone the extra mile for one of our veterans.

Before the pandemic, 91-year-old blind veteran Peter Pope would visit our rehabilitation centre in Ovingdean on a Monday and Friday. **The closure to day visitors back in March, left widower Peter feeling very lonely.**

Luckily, we were able to put him in touch with volunteer befriender, 75-year-old Sylvia Woodcock. The two have developed quite the budding friendship at a time which has been extremely isolating.

Sylvia says: "I love our weekly chats and Peter has become a great friend. He's such an interesting chap and we enjoy having a laugh and a joke together. **I can only say good things about volunteering and would recommend it to anyone.** You can really see the difference you're making to someone's life and that gives me a lot of pleasure."



# Thanks for saving Mark with photography

Mark served in the Light Infantry (Territorial Army) from 1984 as a driver and a Bugler, having been unable to join the regular army due to his eye condition. However the deterioration of his eyesight led to him leaving the TA in July 1993.

In 2000, Mark's vision suddenly got a lot worse. He was registered partially sighted in that year and blind in 2011. After losing his job and his driving licence, he fell into a deep depression. He said: **"I wouldn't accept my sight loss, and if you don't accept it, you stop living."**

With the encouragement of his family, Mark came to us for help: **"The support I've received from Blind Veterans UK has been truly amazing – it has saved my life and I'm a different person. The charity showed me that there is still so much I can do despite my sight loss. I've taken up photography and framing, giving me a new lease of life."**

We supported Mark with tools to help him follow his passion, but he says it's the support from staff and the other veterans that has made all the difference. **"You don't have to pretend. Everyone is in the same boat."**

During the lockdown last April, **Mark decided to reach out to other blind veterans and has been running a remote photography group.** They have weekly catch up sessions, and over time the group has grown.

Once again, the company of other veterans, albeit remotely, has done Mark the world of good. "I've barely been out since March 2020, the only time I go out is to take my guide dog for a walk. The photography club has been something I've really enjoyed and I hope it can continue. It keeps the contact going."

## Do you know a photographer?

Mark regularly asks guest speakers to join the remote sessions, to share their knowledge of photography, skills and pictures with the group. If you know a photographer who could speak as a guest for the BVUK Remote Photography club please email Mark at:

**Mark.Pile@blindveterans.org.uk**  
Thank you



Mark doing what he loves best



# Woodturning together

Two blind veterans, who are both helped by your generous support, have kept in contact during the pandemic due to their mutual interest in woodturning.

Bill Whitworth, 76 and from Nottingham, has been sharing tips and tricks with Gary Stevenson, 53, from Derby, after realising that they both share an interest in woodturning; a craft which involves using a lathe and hand-held tools to cut wood into different objects.

Gary served in the Army, in both the Royal Engineers and Royal Corps of Transport. **He lost his sight due to meningitis and started receiving support from us in 2015.** He also volunteers for us as an IT helper and regularly visited veterans in his local area before the lockdown restrictions. He says: **"The charity have done so much for me and volunteering was my way of giving something back."**

Gary was introduced to woodturning at our Llandudno centre. He says: **"I really enjoyed it and found it very therapeutic. The charity have**

**recently helped supply me with my own workshop so I can do it at home. I knew Bill from the charity and found out during lockdown that he has been doing the craft for 25 years! He's been helping me a lot over the phone with different tips and techniques."**



Gary, busy in his workshop

Bill served in the Army from 1961 until 1983. He lost his sight due to Age Related Macular Degeneration. Bill trained as an apprentice carpenter and started woodturning as a hobby about 25 years ago. Before his sight loss, he made toys which he then sold on a stall in his local town centre. He says: **"I was into toy masonry and every year I used to make one big toy which I would auction off for a local charity. As my sight loss got worse I could no longer continue and I was out of the workshop for about two and a half years".**

Fortunately, when Bill became a blind veteran in 2018, he was able to continue working in his workshop thanks to equipment we provided him with – all thanks to your support.

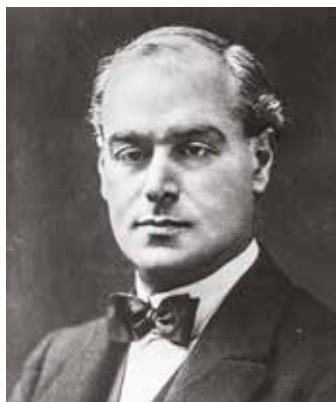
"Blind Veterans UK gave me a magnifier which I can put over my lathe. **I remember when I first visited the charity's Llandudno centre, I came away feeling reinvigorated** – I've never looked back. It's been great to meet someone like Gary with who I have a mutual interest. I've enjoyed helping him and it's kept us busy during lockdown".



Veteran woodturner Bill



# Follow in the footsteps of our founder



**Sir Arthur Pearson, our founder, had philanthropic interests from a young age. His background was in writing and publishing, before his own eyesight deteriorated and he sold his numerous businesses in order to focus on his philanthropy. Now, we're inviting you to join a special society to carry on his great work.**

After living with his own sight loss through the First World War, Sir Arthur formed the Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Care Committee in 1915, before moving to a larger premises at St Dunstan's, Regent's Park. **Veterans were given training in special occupations, braille and typing, together with a wide range of sporting and social activities.**

In recognition of his work, Sir Arthur was created a baronet (1st Baronet of St Dunstan's) in 1916, and later awarded the G.B.E. He sadly passed away at the aged of 55 in 1921, however his legacy has thrived. In 2019, an official English Heritage blue plaque was placed at 21 Portland Place, London, to recognise

his contribution to society and our veterans past, present and future.

**In 2020, we launched the Sir Arthur Pearson Society, which invites donors to become a part of an exclusive membership, with entry levels starting from £1,000.**

As a member, you'll receive a variety of special benefits, such as special event invitations, naming opportunities and dedicated support from your Philanthropy Advisor. We want to ensure that we respect your personal values and honor your legacy, from now and for years to come.

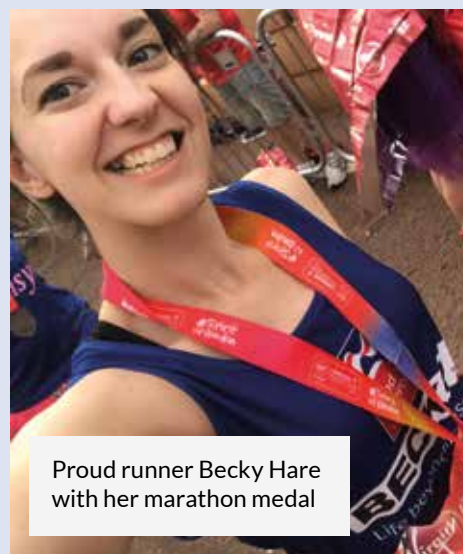
**Please get in touch for more information**  
**Tel: 020 7616 7905**  
**Email: [philanthropy@blindveterans.org.uk](mailto:philanthropy@blindveterans.org.uk)**

## March on with pride

As you know, due to coronavirus restrictions, it's a long time since we've been able to fundraise through the community and national events we rely on. This has caused a significant drop in income. But all is not lost, here are two great ways to fundraise and keep the pennies rolling in for our beloved blind veterans.

In March we usually organise a series of 10 km walks throughout the UK. As this is tricky at the moment, we've put together everything you need to march 10 km with your bubble, any time you like.

**Sign up now and put your best foot forward**  
**[blindveterans.org.uk/planyourmarch](https://blindveterans.org.uk/planyourmarch)**



Proud runner Becky Hare with her marathon medal

## Sign up for the Virgin London Marathon 2021

The return of the Virgin London Marathon is planned for Sunday 3 October. Join Team Blind Veterans for the UK's most iconic race. The atmosphere is electric and we'll give you all the support you need.

**Sign up below to be part of something special**  
**[blindveterans.org.uk/londonmarathon](https://blindveterans.org.uk/londonmarathon)**

# Ron's lasting legacy

Since 1915, Blind Veterans UK has made a lifelong commitment to every blind and partially-sighted veteran – a promise to be there for them, to offer practical and emotional support and to help them discover life beyond sight loss. But without gifts in Wills, none of that is possible.

No-one knows the impact of a gift in your Will better than blind veteran Ron Skidmore.



of support gives you the inspiration to say, **'No, I am not a waste heap, come on, you have a useful life to live.'**

I have written Blind Veterans UK into my Will because they are part of my family now. I have left a legacy which will be handed to Blind Veterans UK on my death and I urge others who can do the same to join me. It is a privilege to be able to remember and honour the service Blind Veterans UK has given me, long after I am gone."

**Call 020 7616 7953**  
**Email [giftsinwills@blindveterans.org.uk](mailto:giftsinwills@blindveterans.org.uk)**  
**Visit [blindveterans.org.uk/legacy](https://blindveterans.org.uk/legacy)**

## Help them reunite

World War II veteran, Bill Davies from Porthcawl, is hoping to find Robert McCutcheon or any of his family members, after visiting Creully in Normandy last year for the 75th anniversary of the D-Day landings. Bill says: **"Robert and I landed in a field in Creully a few days after D-Day. When I went back last year, I saw a beautiful marble monument with our names on. I was shocked because I never knew it was there! I'd like to reach out to Robert, in case he doesn't know either."**

If you have any information or if you could help with Bill's search, please contact our press office

**Call 020 7616 7980**

**Email [pressoffice@blindveterans.org.uk](mailto:pressoffice@blindveterans.org.uk)**



## A special birthday tribute

Our centre in Llandudno is usually full of blind veterans but has been empty since



closing its doors in March, due to the pandemic. However, on 21 September it reopened. **The first guest was 87-year-old veteran Jim Sherratt.** Little did he know, he was there to receive a surprise present of a refurbished Llandudno Pier bench, dedicated to his late wife.

Jim who has no vision in his left eye and only two per cent vision in his right, hadn't left the house since November. Jim said, **"I've been looking forward to coming back here for months. It's feels great to be back in this amazing place with such caring staff."** Happy birthday Jim!



# Win big like Mrs Stanford



**A**t just £1 per entry, you could win big by entering our exciting Weekly Lottery with a top prize of £500, with all proceeds going towards helping ex-Service men and women living with sight loss. If you take part, you will automatically be entered into our Superdraw with the chance of winning £15,000 four times a year. Winner Mrs Stanford, shared how she felt on winning:

"I'm absolutely thrilled as it's my birthday in three days' time. Although I'm going to be spending the winnings on my granddaughters, it's wonderful to know that, by taking part, I'm supporting Blind Veterans UK – a charity which my late husband Stanley had such high regard for."



To enter visit  
[weeklylottery.org.uk/  
blindveterans](http://weeklylottery.org.uk/blindveterans).

## WEEKLY LOTTERY



**BeGambleAware.org**

You must be 18 or over and live in Great Britain to play or claim a prize. Full Terms and Conditions apply, please see [weeklylottery.org.uk/blindveterans/lottery-rules](http://weeklylottery.org.uk/blindveterans/lottery-rules) for more details.

