



Welcome to the Blind Veterans UK family

Your journey starts here



Rebuilding
lives after
sight loss

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Hello and welcome to Blind Veterans UK

My name is Colin Williamson and I find myself in the very privileged position of being President of this unique and life-changing charity.

I became a Member of Blind Veterans UK back in 2003 after a trauma to the skull left me with several skull fractures, severe sight loss in the right eye and no central vision in my left. Never did I think that one day I would be welcoming you all as President of the charity. To me, this clearly illustrates that it's never too late in life's eventful journey to be the person you thought you'd never be. I sincerely hope that my story will inspire others.

I now work for the charity as the Member Engagement Lead, where my role is to ensure our Members' voices are heard and acted upon.



Caption - Blind Veterans UK President Colin Williamson

I'm also part of the Project Gemini team, which organises an annual exchange programme between Members of Blind Veterans UK, the US-based Blinded Veterans Association, St Dunstan's South Africa and Vision Bermuda.

Blind Veterans UK has provided me with the tools and skills to go on and lead an independent and fulfilling life and I am hugely appreciative.

Being a Member of Blind Veterans UK means different things to different people. Some use the charity as a safety net in the knowledge that we will be there to support them whenever the need arises, while others use our services and support on a daily basis. Never forget, we are here to support you for the long term. This is your charity and I would strongly suggest you make the most of your membership of Blind Veterans UK.

I'm confident that you will benefit enormously from being a Member of the charity and I hope you get as much enjoyment out of being a Member as I have. Whether it be learning new skills, regaining your independence, joining one of the many clubs and associations or simply seeking companionship, Blind Veterans UK is here to help.

I wish you well and welcome you to the Blind Veterans UK family!



Caption - Blind veteran with CSW

Your community team

Since its beginning, Blind Veterans UK has been a family. We call the beneficiaries who we support Members. Our family is made up of staff, volunteers and the Members themselves, along with our large number of supporters all across the country.

Blind Veterans UK has community teams throughout the UK who work closely with our Members in their homes and local areas. Whatever happens, your community team is

there to support you and be your main point of contact. Now that you have become a Member, you will soon be contacted by your local Community Support Worker (CSW).

Your CSW will work with you on a number of areas:

- To provide support so that you can develop the skills and confidence to remain independent.
- To help you build strong, effective support networks.
- To support you in taking part in purposeful activity and help you manage your own health and lifestyle.

- To assist in making you feel safe and secure in your home and community.
- To enable you to live with dignity.

We will continually assess your need for advice and information, rehabilitation, care and support. With you, we'll set goals and help you to achieve them. As we work in your community, we will be easily reachable if you need us. We also work with other organisations to maximise your independence and opportunities, and allow you to access the support that you need.

Blind Veterans UK staff understand the impact that sight loss can have on confidence and that this can often result in social isolation. Our community teams arrange social events and activities to bring Members together for companionship and camaraderie. These may include coffee mornings, lunch clubs, day trips, group telephone calls or our regular events. Your CSW will let you know about what is happening in your local area. One of the first things they will do is talk to you about attending one of our introduction weeks.



Caption - Two of our veterans planting flowers at an activity day

Introduction weeks

All new Members are offered the opportunity to participate in an introduction week, more commonly known as an intro week. This group will be held within your local community, online, over the telephone, or at one of our centres. Your CSW will discuss with you the options available for joining an intro week.

The aim of the intro week is to welcome you to the charity, to allow you to learn more about Blind Veterans UK and socialise with other new Members, and to consider how we may best be able to support you in your sight loss journey. During the sessions, you will be provided with information and support, and any relevant signposting and referrals will be made.

The intro weeks endeavour to support all Members in discovering and developing greater independence, confidence, skills, and improved quality of life and health. Where available, you will be able to explore a wide range of both everyday and extraordinary activities, adaptations, technologies, interests, potential hobbies and vocations.

Whether it be face to face or by telephone, the weeks will allow you to interact with other

Members and benefit from the common ground of living with sight loss and being ex-Armed Forces personnel, while sharing your experiences and developing relationships.

The intro week is delivered in three ways:

- 1 Group telephone calls. Blind Veterans UK uses technology to bring a group of Members together.
- 2 Attending a location within your community for a face-to-face intro week.
- 3 Attending a Blind Veterans UK centre at Llandudno or Brighton. These are usually residential stays of a week's duration.

Caption - Blind veteran using a driving simulation game



Centres – Llandudno and Brighton

Blind Veterans UK has two centres. The Llandudno Centre is situated in North Wales and the Brighton Centre is on the South coast.

As a Member, you are welcome to attend and stay at these centres. This may be for an intro week, rehabilitation and training, holidays, and respite or nursing care. Both centres also offer activities and themed weeks.

Please speak to your CSW if you are interested in hearing more about any of these residential stays, non-residential stays and day visits. You can also contact the booking offices at the centres, and their numbers can be found at the back of this booklet - see page 21.

We can offer appropriate care and

support during any stay, but it is important to be honest and open with staff, in advance, about any care needs you may have.

Centre facilities

Each centre has outdoor terraces, a fully equipped gym, a sports and activity hall, an art and craft workshop, communal lounges and a bar. The Brighton Centre also has a fully heated swimming pool. Both centres offer a huge range of social, creative, leisure and sporting activities. They can help you with fitness and mobility and also provide support with your wellbeing.



Caption - Blind Veterans UK Llandudno Centre

Llandudno Centre

The Llandudno Centre has 40 en-suite bedrooms, both single and double. These rooms are used to accommodate short-term visitors, either on holiday or visiting for rehabilitation and training. These rooms include 14 registered care rooms for Members with additional care needs. All floors are connected by a lift. Within the grounds there are four fully accessible flats and a house for Members to stay in.

This centre, situated near the Victorian resort town of Llandudno, was built in 1902 as a convalescence home for local shale miners. In 2010, the centre was meticulously refurbished to best meet our Members' needs. There are safe pathways and woodland walks (with hand rails) around the large grounds surrounding the centre.



Caption - Members at Blind Veterans UK's Brighton Centre

Brighton Centre

The Brighton Centre has 85 en-suite bedrooms, both single and double, which are used mainly for short-term visitors on holiday or visiting for rehabilitation and training.

This Centre is located four miles outside Brighton. It was purpose-built for Blind Veterans UK in the 1930s. The large grounds have designated safe pathways. It is a short walk from the seafront and the South Downs. Each floor within the building has the same layout to help people keep their bearings. There is also a lift to each floor.



Caption - Blind veteran with carer

Care at our centres

Both of our centres are registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

The centres offer three types of residential stay, dependent on your identified care needs:

Independent

Independent bookings are for fully self-sufficient Members, spouses, or those accompanied by somebody who will provide all the necessary assistance. We do not provide staff assistance for these stays. If you do not receive any support at home and are independent, there is no need to book any care arrangements and you will be treated as a guest with no care input. You can book this type of stay directly with the centre's bookings office.

In order to maximise your experience on holiday or rehab, we provide residential and nursing care at both centres. Your care requirements will be determined by the care team at the centres, your CSW and you, prior to coming to the centre. If you currently have care support coming into your home, you will be booked under residential or nursing care, depending on your needs.

Residential

The kind of support available during a residential stay includes:

- Assistance getting in and out of bed
- Assistance in taking medication and administering eye drops
- Assistance in mobility
- Catheter care
- Assistance with personal hygiene, such as support with bathing, washing skin and nail care
- Help dressing and undressing
- Assistance with eating and drinking
- Help going to the toilet and support if using incontinence pads
- Assistance with compression stockings

Nursing

The kind of support available during a nursing stay includes:

- Administration of medication by injection, for example, insulin for diabetics
- Artificial / PEG feeding
- Management and help with complex prosthesis
- Management and support of unstable, long-term chronic conditions, for example, chronic lung and heart disease and diabetes
- Management and support of chronic wounds
- Support with oxygen can be provided

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the centre or your CSW for further information.

Ever increasing circles

Member **Fred Finlay** makes a request for our woodturners to unite

When I was first diagnosed with wet and dry age-related macular degeneration I was devastated at losing my cherished car due to an immediate driving ban, while my golf suffered to such an extent that I was as miserable as h*!.

I was accepted by Blind Veterans UK and during my induction week at the Brighton Centre, I spotted the woodwork shop. I expressed an interest, and was called back for a basic course. What a change this has made to my life - although I had last used a lathe as a 15-year old during my RAF apprenticeship, I was given lots of help



Caption: Fred's well-equipped workshop

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which has set me off with a wonderful relaxing hobby.

Through the charity I have been loaned a set of basic chisels, and I subsequently sold my golf clubs and bought a lathe of my own. My kids came to the party, and gifted me a stack of wood blanks to set me off. I already had a significant workshop having spent 35 years making golf clubs and restoring vintage motorcycles, so I am fully equipped with tooling.

Is it possible to start a group of woodturners so we can chat and maybe get together on Zoom for example, to discuss both what is a wonderful, relaxing hobby, and how we can overcome our vision induced problems, while benefitting from some advice? 🍷

If you're interesting in forming a woodturning group with Fred and others then please pass on your contact details to the editor of Review at revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk, or call 0207 6168 367.

In the open air

Our Brighton Centre residents were treated to an outdoor concert from the Not Forgotten Association writes **Emma Allum**

In 1919, Miss Marta Cunningham, an American soprano, visited a Ministry of Pensions Hospital. What she saw there would lead to events that would brighten the lives of many service men and, eventually, women.

With the support of the Royal Family



Caption: Enjoying the open air at Brighton

and many benevolent minded members of the public, Marta created The Not Forgotten Association, dedicated to bringing sunshine to those who fought for our country in the First World War. What started off as an organisation that would arrange hospital visits and concerts, with tea drives and gifts of fruit, chocolates and cigarettes, then became a major force in the drive for rehabilitation of those injured in combat. The Second World War was to create even more former servicemen and women in need of support, and although the amount of members dwindled in the 1960's, the deployment of British Armed Forces in modern day conflicts means that their work is still ongoing.

Blind Veterans UK has a long association with The Not Forgotten. Did you know that the yearly Garden Party at Buckingham Palace, to which we have been invited every year, is arranged and paid for by The Not Forgotten? We have been on trips to The Bluebell Railway, for a ride →

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Caption - An open double-page spread of our Review magazine

Review magazine

As a Member, you will receive our monthly magazine, Review. The first edition of this magazine was published in 1915 and, over a 100 years later, the Review continues to be packed with information and articles for our Members.

In order to make it accessible to our Members, the Review can be received in a number of different formats such as print and audio (including Alexa). Your CSW will discuss the available options with you, to determine which format will best suit your needs and capability.



Caption - Blind veteran Ken chatting over tea with volunteer

Volunteers

Across the United Kingdom, Blind Veterans UK volunteers give up their own time to support Members in many ways.

This can be through home visiting and providing companionship, providing transport, helping at events and outings, and telephone befriending. We also have volunteers who help within our centres and who support our fundraising activities. Some of our volunteers are also Members.

Each community team and both centres has a dedicated Volunteer Co-ordinator (VCO), whose job it is to recruit volunteers across the charity and to support each volunteer within their role. Volunteers who gift their time

to the charity to support Members go through a robust recruitment process and training programme.

For more information, or to discuss how you may benefit from either having volunteer support or becoming a Member volunteer yourself, please contact supporter services or speak to your CSW.

Volunteers are at the heart of supporting our blind veterans and truly make a difference to their lives.

Caption - Blind veteran with carer



Family and carers

Coping with sight loss can be hard for everyone involved, whether that's the person with sight loss or their carer.

We know that sight loss affects the whole family, so as well as helping veterans to get back on their feet, we offer support to carers and families.

A carer is anyone who looks after a friend or family member and isn't paid for their help. We know that carers are typically spouses and children of veterans experiencing sight loss. Becoming a carer to someone with a vision impairment can be a sudden process or it can happen over time as a family member loses their sight due to ageing.

If you care for one of our Members then Blind Veterans UK is here to help you, through:

- Tailored advice and support from Blind Veterans UK's experienced and qualified CSWs
- Addressing the emotional and practical aspects of caring
- Respite for veterans to give family members and carers a well-earned break
- Signposting to other support services
- Providing opportunities to attend social events, carer sessions and meet other carers who are in the same situation

How you can support Blind Veterans UK

There are up to 50,000 blind veterans across the UK who need our support. Currently, we can only reach 10% of them. It's only through the generosity of the supporters like you that we can continue to offer the services we do and reach others.

You can support us in a number of ways. These include:



Regular Giving

blindveterans.org.uk/donate

You can set up a regular gift to the charity through a recurring monthly direct debit.



National and Local Fundraising Events

blindveterans.org.uk/get-involved

Organise or participate in a local or national fundraising event.



Weekly Lottery

blindveterans.org.uk/weeklylottery

Enter our lottery and be in with a chance win a weekly prize, including a jackpot of £500.



Free Will Service

Please contact our legacy team on 0300 111 22 33 or email

giftsinwills@blindveterans.org.uk

You can write or amend your Will free of charge through our Will writing partners.



Volunteer

volunteer.blindveterans.org.uk/opportunities

Read about the various ways you can give your time.

A portrait of an elderly man, Eddie, with short grey hair and a serious expression. He is wearing a white dress shirt, a striped tie in red, white, and blue, and light-colored suspenders. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Caption - Blind veteran Eddie

Eddie's story

Eddie's story demonstrates the life-changing impact our practical and emotional support has on blind veterans.

Eddie joined the Royal Navy in 1943 and was on Omaha Beach on D-Day. He was a petrol stoker on a landing craft carrying 35 tonnes of TNT and a bulldozer. Along with four other crew members, he set off from Poole on June 4 in preparation for the Allied invasion of France. They continued to work on Omaha Beach, transporting ammunition,

equipment and men, for several months and he served in Normandy until Christmas Eve 1944.

"I was off Omaha Beach on D-Day and 3,000 men died there before noon alone."

Eddie

Eddie started receiving support from Blind Veterans UK in 2016 after losing his sight later in life due to age-related macular degeneration. He was told about the charity at his local library and has since received support, training and equipment to allow him to continue to live as independently as possible.

“I’m not really a religious man but I thank the Lord for Blind Veterans UK” - Eddie

Eddie is also supported in his local community by his Community Support Worker Lorraine and the rest of his local team. Lorraine visits Eddie regularly to make sure he has everything he needs.

Eddie says; “They have given me a special reader that magnifies documents to a huge size. It has allowed me to still look after my own correspondence and even get back into building models. I’ve also recently started learning how to use a tablet computer. I get quite emotional remembering the moment when I was being shown all this marvellous equipment and then being told that I was taking it home with me.”

In 2018, Eddie was recognised for his outstanding work as an ambassador for Blind Veterans UK



Caption - Blind veteran Eddie raising his Blind Veterans UK flag

by being presented with a Founder’s Day Award, the charity’s highest honour. He was nominated for the award by Lorraine for his “unlimited enthusiasm and willingness to help Blind Veterans UK encourage others to receive support from the charity”.

“The last time I visited I asked if I could have a Blind Veterans UK flag so I could literally fly the flag for the organisation outside my house!” - Eddie



Caption - Archive photo of four blinded veterans and two nurses walking arm in arm

History of Blind Veterans UK

- **1915** - Blind Veterans UK is founded by Sir Arthur Pearson as the Blinded Soldiers' and Sailors' Care Committee. We provide support to those blinded in the First World War.
- **1917** - Ian Fraser, who had been blinded at the Somme, is placed in charge of our after-care work.
- **1921** - Sir Arthur Pearson dies, aged only 55. Ian Fraser takes over as Chairman, a position he holds for 53 years.
- **1923** - We formally adopt the name **St Dunstan's**.
- **1935** - Working together with the National Institute of Blind People (now the RNIB) we establish the Talking Book library.
- **1938** - We open our centre at Ovingdean, Brighton.
- **1940** - We move our training and rehabilitation work from Brighton to Church Stretton in Shropshire for the war, returning to Brighton in 1946.

- **1952** - Her Majesty The Queen becomes our Patron.
- **1965** - We collaborate with institutions in the United States on the development of the new long cane walking stick and with the RNIB on its introduction in this country.
- **2000** - We change our constitution, expanding to allow all veterans who have lost their sight to join us, irrespective of when and how this occurred.
- **2011** - We open our centre at Llandudno in North Wales.
- **2012** - We change our name to **Blind Veterans UK**, to help more people understand who we are and what we do.
- **2015** - We celebrate our 100th anniversary with special events, including a Buckingham Palace garden party and a service at Westminster Abbey.
- **2016** - Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex becomes our new Patron. Her first act as Patron is to open our life skills building at the Llandudno Centre.
The charity launches a new strategy, providing more support to our Members in their own community.
- **2017** - Ray Hazan OBE steps down as President after 13 years. Blind veteran Colin Williamson becomes the sixth Blind Veterans UK President.

The charity once again takes a step into research, to help our veterans in the future. We are now running exciting projects in the areas of biomedical research, social and welfare research, and innovations.
- **2020/21** - The National Support Service is set up, to provide a home-based outreach service to support our Members during the Covid-19 pandemic. During this time, most of the support is delivered remotely, using various technologies.

Definitions

Blind Veterans UK often uses acronyms and abbreviations. To assist you, below is a list of the most commonly used ones with their meanings.

A&C – Art and craft

CSW – Community Support Worker

CTL – Community Team Leader

H&W / S&W – Health and wellbeing / sport and wellbeing

IT – Information technology

MESH – Member Support Hub

ROVI – Rehabilitation Officer for people with a Visual Impairment

VCO – Volunteer Co-ordinator

WAM – Working-Age Member



Blind Veterans UK support Services contact Numbers

Member Support Hub (MESH)

The telephone line is open from Monday to Friday, 9am-4pm

Please call **01273 391 447**

Alternatively, the email address is mesh@blindveterans.org.uk.

Brighton Centre

Reception: **01273 307 811**

Bookings office: To book accommodation at the Brighton Centre please telephone **01273 391 500**. If you have care needs please first contact your CSW.

Llandudno Centre

Reception / bookings office: To book accommodation at the Llandudno Centre please telephone **01492 868 700**. If you have care needs please first contact your CSW.

Fundraising team and volunteering

To contact us about any fundraising enquiries, please telephone **0300 111 22 33** or email supporter.services@blindveterans.org.uk.

Head office

The address is **Blind Veterans UK, 12-14 Harcourt Street, London, W1H 4HD**. For enquiries, please telephone **0300 111 22 33**.

Prospective Members

If you know somebody who could be eligible to join Blind Veterans UK, they can phone our membership team on freephone **0800 389 79 79** or apply via the website blindveterans.org.uk

Other helpful organisations

R N I B

See differently

The Royal National Institute of Blind People or RNIB offers help and support for blind and partially sighted people – this can be anything from practical and emotional support, campaigning for change, reading services or equipment support. This is also the contact number for their Talking Books service.

RNIB

Helpline number- 0303 123 99 99

rnib.org.uk



Guide Dogs

Telephone number- 0345 143 0229

guidedogs.org.uk

Guide Dogs have a range of services aside from their mobility support with the provision of a guide dog. They can also help with free sighted-guiding training for partners and carers, support with technology and general family support to help you move forward.



Age UK

Age UK advice line – 0800 055 61 12

Free to call 8am–7pm, 365 days a year

ageuk.org.uk

Age UK is the country's largest charity dedicated to helping everyone make the most of later life. They provide companionship, advice and support for older people who need it most.



RNID

Telephone number- 0808 808 0123

rnid.org.uk

RNID offers advice, support and guidance to people with hearing loss. Their Aged Veteran Project is committed to supporting all veterans of all ages with hearing loss.



Talking Watch shop

Telephone number – 0345 004 0100

talkingwatchshop.co.uk

The Talking Watch Shop provides a battery replacement and set up service for watches at a very reasonable cost. Please contact the Talking Watch Shop to enquire about current costing.



Local Authority

Telephone number (national) –

02076 643 000

Your local authority has a responsibility to support you with your sight-loss. Registering with them as severely sight impaired or sight impaired is a good way of ensuring you're well supported in your community and you may be eligible for travel concessions, benefits or equipment. If you're unsure on how to contact your specific authority speak to your CSW for guidance.



Synapptic Ltd

Helpline telephone number –

0191 909 7909. Call between the hours of 9am–5pm, Monday to Friday

synapptic.com

Synapptic is happy to support Synapptic users with any queries, troubleshooting or tutorials. This can be done over the telephone or by accessing your device remotely.



Dolphin

Helpline telephone number –

01905 754765. Call between the hours of 9am–5pm, Monday to Friday

yourdolphin.com

Dolphin is happy to support Dolphin Guide and Supernova users with any technical support.

Notes

**Community Support Worker (CSW)
Name / contact number:**

You can write notes and questions in the space below.

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blindveterans.org.uk

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12-14 Harcour Street,
London W1H 4HD

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