

# Veterans Newsletter NI



## Service and the Unity That Binds Us Together

**Courage • Discipline • Respect • Integrity • Loyalty • Selfless Commitment**

Issue #4

September 2025

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Service doesn't end when the uniform comes off, it is a foundation for life. The values that shaped us during our time in the Armed Forces continue to guide us long afterwards: courage, discipline, respect for others, integrity, loyalty, and selfless commitment. These aren't just words; they are lived every day by veterans across Northern Ireland.

Left: 106 year old REME Veteran Norman Irwin has recently been announced & awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) for a range of voluntary work in his home County of Londonderry. He is the oldest recipient on the King's birthday Honours list.

In this edition, we shine a light on those who have overcome adversity, gone above and beyond to support others, and whose extraordinary stories continue to inspire. Their experiences remind us that life after service is not the end, it is a new beginning. What follows is just as important as the time spent in uniform, and the impact veterans make in their communities is every bit as meaningful.

Over the past three months, we've seen remarkable examples of veterans coming together in sport, remembrance, and service to others. In the pages ahead, we'll reflect on these moments, celebrate achievements, and share what lies ahead in the months to come.

This newsletter is for all of us, a reminder of who we are, what we stand for, and the unity that continues to bind us together.



Above: Irish Guards veteran Graham Fergus on Op Home – a selfless commitment to raising funds for local and service charities here in Northern Ireland



# Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Update - September 2025

When I was appointed Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner in January 2025, I had hoped that legacy would not need to be a dominant central focus of my role. However, over the year, there has been a significant shift due to rulings, outcomes and government positions relating to legacy matters here in Northern Ireland. It has become increasingly clear that veterans must be properly represented in these areas, particularly where cases risk being unfair or unbalanced.

As Commissioner, my role is to advocate for veterans living in Northern Ireland and to ensure their voices are heard. That often means engaging in difficult but necessary conversations, including raising concerns at the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in May and attending a parliamentary debate on legacy legislation, following a petition that has now gathered close to 200,000 signatures. Ongoing court cases, some dealing with events from over 50 years ago, reinforce the importance of ensuring that veterans know someone is standing with them, prepared to speak up on their behalf.

In recent months, I have issued a number of statements reflecting these concerns, always with the intention of ensuring fairness and representation. Yet I also want to shine a light on the remarkable work happening every day across Northern Ireland's veteran community. Service charities, support networks, and veterans themselves are making invaluable contributions, whether through volunteering, sharing their stories on podcasts, or supporting their peers in local hubs. I have been struck by the number of veterans who have sat down with me, spoken candidly, and offered constructive thoughts and perspectives. These conversations help shape both local strategies and the wider UK approach to veteran issues.

Looking ahead, we have much to look forward to. This September, our annual Iraq and Afghanistan event will take place. In November, we are again hopeful of joining with Linfield Football Club at Windsor Park for an act of remembrance. And in October, we will be holding another roadshow event in Banbridge, continuing our outreach



Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner, Mr David Johnstone



L-R: Al Carns MP (then Minister for Veterans & People) Susie Hamilton – Scottish Veterans Commissioner, David Johnstone NI Veterans Commissioner & James Phillips Veterans Commissioner for Wales; attending the Parliamentary Debate – July 2025

across Northern Ireland. These sit alongside the ongoing efforts of veterans' champions, charities, and hubs that provide essential support and connection.

I strongly encourage all veterans in Northern Ireland to engage with their local hub. It offers a space for conversation, camaraderie, and support, a place to share a brew, some banter, and the reassurance of being among those who understand.

My office remains committed to supporting veterans in every way we can. Please do not hesitate to reach out by emailing [commissioner@nivco.co.uk](mailto:commissioner@nivco.co.uk).





# Northern Ireland Armed Forces Day 2025 – A Day to Remember

Armed Forces Week took place in the UK at the end of June, but here in Northern Ireland, our celebrations took place a week earlier, on Saturday 21 June, and what a day it was!

Thousands of people turned out at Newtownards Airfield, where Ards and North Down Borough Council proudly hosted this year's Northern Ireland Armed Forces Day. The event provided a wonderful opportunity for the public to come together and show their appreciation for service personnel, veterans, cadets, and their families.



Above: NI Veterans Commissioner, Deputy First Minister & SSAFA present at this year's Armed Forces Day.  
Above Right: The Red Arrows demonstrate their only aerobatic display in Northern Ireland this year.  
Bottom Right: The Band of The Royal Irish Regiment parade alongside the Irish Guards Irish Wolfhound Mascot Seamus and his handler



The atmosphere throughout the day was electric, with the airfield buzzing with activity. Visitors enjoyed a packed programme that included military displays, cadet demonstrations, and interactive exhibitions, alongside a strong presence from charitable organisations supporting the Armed Forces community. The event was very much family orientated, ensuring there was something for all ages while showcasing the very best of our Armed Forces.

Among the many highlights, the Red Arrows delivered their trademark show stopping aerial performance, always a crowd favourite, and this year their only display in Northern Ireland. Complementing this was the RAF Falcons Parachute Display Team, which impressed with a breathtaking jump that had everyone looking to the skies.

Events like these did not happen without the hard work and commitment of many. A sincere thank you went to everyone who attended, participated, volunteered, or supported the day in any way. Their contributions made it possible to celebrate the dedication, courage, and commitment of the Armed Forces in such a meaningful way.

As the celebrations in Newtownards drew to a close, the official baton for hosting Northern Ireland Armed Forces Day was formally passed to Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, who will lead next year's event. With the bar set high, anticipation was already building for what promises to be another memorable celebration.

Northern Ireland Armed Forces Day 2025 will be remembered not only for its spectacular displays but also for the sense of community, pride, and gratitude that brought thousands together in honour of our Armed Forces.

# From Commando to Canvas:

## How One Veteran Found Peace in Paint

A chance meeting abroad revealed an extraordinary story of resilience. Ben, a former Army Commando who served in Afghanistan, discovered a new life through painting—a journey that not only helped him manage PTSD but now inspires veterans and art lovers alike.

When Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner David Johnstone unexpectedly met Ben while on leave abroad, he encountered a story of resilience, creativity, and transformation that has inspired many.

Born in Peterborough in 1985, Ben knew from a young age that he wanted to join the Army. He pursued the historic path of the Army Commandos, serving with 29 Commando Regiment as a Bombardier. Ben trained in some of the world's harshest conditions, from Arctic leadership exercises in Norway to working alongside the US Marines on Exercise Aurora. By the age of 20, he was deployed to Afghanistan as a Section Commander, carrying the heavy responsibility of leading men in combat.



Afghanistan, Herrick 5  
This was taken during my deployment as a Section Commander. I was 20 years old at the time.



Ben Goymour, a former Army Commando, discovered painting in 2017. Today he is a full-time artist, channeling his creativity while finding a powerful way to manage his complex PTSD.

But in 2017, after a hiking trip in the Lake District, everything changed. Ben describes the fells as the only place where he truly felt free from “the noise in my head.” Wandering into local galleries, he wanted a piece of art that captured the calm he felt in the hills—but when he couldn't find anything suitable, he decided to create it himself.

“I thought I was just buying paint,” Ben recalls with a smile. “Turns out I was buying a whole new life.”

His first attempts were clumsy, and his wife Kerry laughed—but she also encouraged him. Painting became a daily ritual, something that offered focus, calm, and, most importantly, a distraction from the mental battles he carried. Within months, Kerry had secretly taken some of Ben's early works to a gallery—and they sold. What began as a personal experiment had sparked a new career.

By 2021, Ben had hung up his beloved Estwing hammer and devoted himself entirely to painting. His work spans landscapes, seascapes, and wildlife, capturing the moods and textures of nature. “I want my paintings to feel like a painting,” he explains. “Not a photograph. I want people to sit with it, feel it, and take something different from it each time they look.” His inspiration comes from wild camping, hiking, and spending hours observing how light falls across a landscape—moments that inform the depth and atmosphere of his work.

Yet painting is more than an artistic pursuit. Ben credits it with helping him manage complex PTSD. “It's not a cure, but it's a lifeline,” he says. He now works with Phoenix Heroes PTSD Veteran Support, donating paintings to raise funds and hosting art therapy sessions for other veterans.



Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner David Johnstone meets Ben Goymour and his wife Kelly by chance while abroad. A morning run sparked a conversation after David noticed Ben's commando tattoo, leading to an inspiring story of resilience and creativity.



# A Life Rebuilt, One Brushstroke at a Time



Wildlife in motion: Ben's work spans many subjects, reflecting what inspires him in the moment. He paints from feeling rather than following a single style or specialty.

Ben's journey is a reminder that as veterans, we often find our releases in many different ways—some expected, some surprising—and that these outlets can be inspiring to others. For Ben, that outlet became painting, a craft that brings him peace and allows him to give back to the veteran community.

You can explore Ben's work and upcoming exhibitions at his website: [www.bengoymour.com](http://www.bengoymour.com)

"I never imagined painting would change my life," Ben reflects. "It gave me peace when I needed it most, and now it's something I share with others. That, more than anything, makes it worthwhile."

## Capture Your Story: Military and Veteran Family Memoir Writing Events



Reading Force Northern Ireland is hosting a series of memoir writing events for military and veteran families this October:

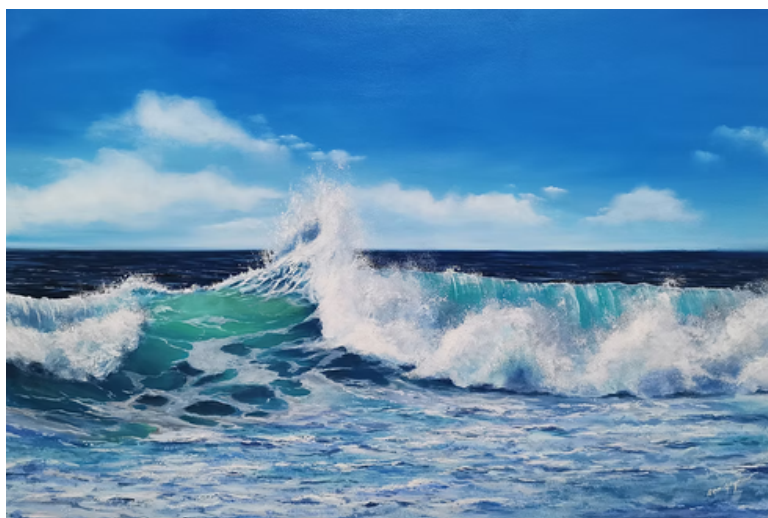
- Thursday 2nd October – Somme Museum
- Friday 3rd October – Brooke House
- Saturday 4th October – Brooke House

Have you ever thought about writing a memoir? On Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> – Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> October, Reading Force will hold a memoir writing workshop designed to help families capture and preserve their stories. With expert guidance from publisher and memoir writing specialist Alison Baverstock, participants will learn how to start writing their story, record and store memories for future generations, and prepare their work for publication if desired.

You do not need to be the service person to participate – partners and children also have valuable stories to share. Research shows that writing a memoir offers real health and wellbeing benefits, as well as peace of mind in knowing your story will live on.

Booking is required via Eventbrite. For further information and to reserve your place, please visit: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/military-memoir-writing-tickets>

This is a wonderful opportunity to reflect, record, and preserve the extraordinary stories of military life.



Mastering landscapes: A talented artist, Ben captures complex scenes such as the ocean, conveying mood, texture, and atmosphere with remarkable depth.



Alison Baverstock – Founder of Reading Force and host of the NI Memoir Writing Events taking place in October 2025





# Blesma Joins Hillsborough Castle's 2025 Scarecrow Parade, 4 Oct - 9 Nov 2025



BLESMA members who enjoyed a day out for some creative fun, making a scarecrow for the Hillsborough Castle Scarecrow Parade – A great team effort and we can't not acknowledge the sense of humour as well! huge Well done BLESMA NI!



BLESMA's Long John Silver Scarecrow that will be on display at Hillsborough Castle Scarecrow Parade, 4 Oct – 9 Nov 2025.

In September, members had the wonderful opportunity to take part in a truly creative project – working alongside the talented local artist Shauna McGowan to design and build our very own Blesma Scarecrow.

Our entry for this year's Hillsborough Castle Scarecrow Parade is none other than the swashbuckling pirate Long John Silver. With Shauna's artistic guidance and plenty of teamwork, Long John came to life in spectacular style, ready to stand proudly among the other imaginative creations in the Castle's Walled Garden.

The Scarecrow Parade runs from 4 October to 9 November 2025, transforming the historic gardens into a playful and colourful trail filled with characters of every shape and size. Families and visitors can wander through the displays, enjoy the creativity on show, and even vote for their favourite scarecrow.

For our members, the afternoon was about more than just craftwork. It was a chance to connect, share laughs, and be part of a local community event that celebrates imagination and togetherness. Projects like this highlight the value of creativity and camaraderie, reminding us that fun and friendship are as important as tradition and remembrance in our veterans' community.

A huge thank you goes to Shauna McGowan for her inspiration and support, and to everyone who helped bring our pirate to life. We look forward to seeing visitors meet Long John Silver!





# 125 Years of the Irish Guards Celebrations Take Place in Northern Ireland



Top Right: The Band of the Irish Guards alongside their Irish Wolfhound mascot parade in Bangor - Sep 2025.  
Bottom Right: The Irish Guards Parade in front of Carrickfergus Castle for a Beating Retreat - Sep 2025.  
Bottom: A congregation gathers in St Marks Church, Dundela for the laying up of the old Regimental Colours



September 2025 marked a landmark occasion for the Irish Guards, who travelled to Northern Ireland to take part in a series of events commemorating the Regiment's 125th anniversary. Established in 1900 by Queen Victoria in recognition of the bravery of Irish soldiers during the Boer War, the Regiment continues to uphold a proud tradition of service, professionalism, and excellence.

Sunday 7th September 2025, the Irish Guards paraded from Campbell College to St Mark's Church, Dundela, where a special service was held to lay up the old Regimental Colours. The day concluded with a parade to Clonaver on the Holywood Road, marking a moving tribute to the Regiment's long and distinguished history.

Over the course of the weekend, the Regiment showcased its precision, professionalism, and rich heritage, with parades in Bangor featuring the Band of the Irish Guards and the much-loved Regimental mascot, Seamus the Irish Wolfhound. In Carrickfergus, a spectacular beating retreat demonstrated the Regiment's ceremonial skill and brought together serving members, veterans, and the local community in a memorable display.



The anniversary celebrations also included a range of activities highlighting the Regiment's community connections. These included participation and organisation in the annual ACF Cadet Mini Micks competition, a Regimental dinner, and a charity golf day at Edenmore Golf Course, reflecting both the Regiment's enduring ties with local communities and its commitment to charitable causes.

Throughout the weekend, the Irish Guards demonstrated the pride, dedication, and camaraderie that have defined the Regiment for 125 years. From ceremonial parades to social gatherings, each event offered a unique opportunity to celebrate the rich history and ongoing service of this remarkable regiment.

A huge congratulations to all those who took part, and sincere thanks to the people of Northern Ireland for their tremendous support. The 125th anniversary was a fitting tribute to the Irish Guards' courage, professionalism, and enduring legacy.





# ● A Day to Remember: ● Veteran Norman Irwin Honoured at 106



106-year-old veteran Norman Irwin was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal.

During the September Hillsborough Castle Garden Party, 106-year-old veteran Norman Irwin was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal.

Born shortly after the First World War, Norman served with distinction during the Second World War in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. His dedication to both military service and community involvement has left an indelible mark on his hometown of Coleraine, Co. Londonderry.

At 106 years young, Norman was the oldest recipient in the most recent King's Birthday Honours list. He was proudly accompanied by his son and grandson for this memorable occasion, celebrating a lifetime of service and contribution.

The British Empire Medal is awarded to individuals for hands-on service to the community and for achievements that have a lasting impact, often recognising dedication, commitment, and resilience over many years. The King's Birthday Honours are announced annually, acknowledging extraordinary contributions from people across the UK in public service, charity, the arts, and other fields. Norman's award is a powerful testament to both his military service and his ongoing contributions to his community.

A heartfelt congratulations to Norman on his incredible achievement. It was truly a day to remember and a wonderful tribute to dedication, service, and resilience.



106-year-old Norman Irwin is believed to be the oldest resident living in Northern Ireland, in his hometown of Coleraine.



A very special and well deserved day at Hillsborough Castle for veteran Norman Irwin BEM.



# Irish Guards Veteran Graham Fergus Completes “Operation Home” and Raises Over £5,700



Irish Guards veteran Graham Fergus has completed a staggering 10-day challenge to raise awareness of homelessness and support three incredible charities.

On 16 May, Graham set off into the Mourne Mountains with just a one-day supply of food, no tent or rations, a powerful reflection of the uncertainty faced by those without a permanent home.

Carrying 20kg and covering 93 miles, Graham summited five of the seven peaks, relying on the kindness of strangers he met along the way. On average, he encountered eight people a day, all offering food, support, and encouragement, showing the generosity of the community in action. Apparently when you set up camp in a car park under a poncho (in Graham's words - "like a troll") it tends to create a little conversation?

As such, Graham raised over £5,700 for Blesma, the Welcome Organisation, and Andy Allen's Veterans Support NI, all causes close to his heart.

Graham has also recorded a podcast with the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner, sharing his experiences from the challenge. You can listen on Apple, Amazon, Spotify, YouTube, Podbean, or via the NI Veterans Commissioner's website: [www.nivco.co.uk](http://www.nivco.co.uk). It's well worth a listen!

A huge well done to Graham Fergus. His determination, resilience, and generosity are an inspiration, a powerful reminder of the extraordinary contributions of veterans across Northern Ireland.



Irish Guards Veteran Graham Fergus on Operation HOME  
May 2025



While the weather was mostly kind for Graham's expedition, he met some amazing people along the way. Graham took leave from his job to complete this task exercising the core value of selfless commitment. Well done Graham on all your achievements.



# New 'Mourne Veterans Hub' Launched in Kilkeel as part of the Thrive Together Programme

The Schomberg Society is proud to announce the official launch of the new Mourne Veterans Hub, based at the Society's Hairtlan Hub in Kilkeel.

This dedicated space will offer vital support and services to veterans and their families across the Greater Mournes and South Down area. Services will include befriending, welfare advice, drop-in clinics, counselling, breakfast and coffee mornings, creative arts, gardening, leisure activities, and more. The Hub will also provide signposting to other specialist support services.

The Mourne Veterans Hub is one of six new hubs being rolled out across Northern Ireland, supported and managed by Brooke House. The Schomberg Society extends sincere thanks to Brooke House, and to Cllr Henry Reilly, Newry, Mourne & Down Veterans Champion, for his support at the launch event.

Set to open fully in Autumn 2025, the Mourne Veterans Hub aims to be a welcoming and supportive environment for the local armed forces community.



Above: Photos from the opening of the Mourne Veterans Hub.  
Left: The opening and launch of the Londonderry Veterans Hub

## Londonderry Veterans Hub Opens Under Thrive Together Programme

A new Veterans Hub has officially opened in Londonderry's Waterside area as part of the Thrive Together programme, led by Brooke House Health & Wellbeing. This initiative aims to provide veterans and their families with a dedicated, safe space to connect, share experiences, and access tailored support services.

The opening ceremony was attended by distinguished guests, including Mr. Ian Crowe MBE CStJ, His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant for the County Borough of Londonderry, and David Johnstone, the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner. Their presence underscored the significance of the hub in supporting the local veteran community.



Located in the heart of the Waterside, the hub offers a range of veteran-specific projects and activities, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

A heartfelt congratulations is extended to all those involved in bringing this vital resource to fruition. Their dedication and hard work have created a lasting legacy of support for our veterans.

For more information on the Thrive Together programme and the services offered at the Londonderry Veterans Hub, visit: [www.brookehouse.co.uk](http://www.brookehouse.co.uk)



# Supporting Veterans Across Northern Ireland: The Role of Council Veterans' Champions

Did you know that there is a dedicated Veterans' Champion in each of Northern Ireland's 11 councils?

These champions play a vital role in connecting with, engaging, and assisting veterans and their families with understanding and empathy. They work closely with the Veterans Welfare Service NI, the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office, and many third-sector service charities. While the political landscape may vary across councils, having a clear point of contact for veterans is crucial.

## Local Champions in Action

This year, in Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Cllr Dawn Huggins has stepped into the role of Veterans' Champion, with former champion Cllr Philip Anderson continuing to support as Deputy. Dawn already has a number of events planned in her council area.

Across Northern Ireland, Veterans' Champions are actively supporting their communities through remembrance events and local initiatives, including but not limited to the below:

- Annual Somme Memorial in Carrickfergus (MEA Veterans' Champion – Billy Ashe)
- Victory over Japan Day in August (Lisburn & Castlereagh Veterans' Champion – James Tinsley)
- From Basra to Helmand event at Belfast City Hall this September (Belfast Veterans' Champion – James Lawlor)
- UDR Greenfinches event held earlier this year (Mid Ulster Veterans' Champion – Eva Cahoon)

In addition, Veterans' Roadshows have already taken place this year in Antrim, Cookstown, Lisburn, Coleraine, Omagh, and Bangor supported by our Veterans' Champions – with further roadshows planned for Banbridge on Tuesday 21 October, and the Causeway Coast & Glens Mini roadshow on 18 October 2025.



Above: Advertisement for forthcoming Mini Roadshow in Articlave organised by Causeway Coast & Glens Veterans' Champion.



Above: Veterans Champions & NI veterans Commissioner attend the 85<sup>th</sup> Commemoration of the Battle of Britain pictured alongside Chief of Air Staff: Air Chief Marshal, H Smyth CB OBE DFC MA RAF

Top Left: Veterans Champions, Margaret & James Tinsley at VJ Day Commemorations Lisburn, Top Right: James Lawlor at Belfast City Hall, Bottom Left: The Veterans Champions attending the Armed Forces Covenant Conference in Glasgow, Bottom Right: Attendance at the Knockagh memorial 1 July 2025

## Working Together for Veterans

Veterans' Champions meet quarterly alongside the Veterans Welfare Service NI, the Office for Veterans' Affairs, and the NI Veterans Commissioner's Office. Together, we are committed to working collaboratively to improve visibility, outcomes, and support for veterans across Northern Ireland.

**For contact details of the Veterans' Champion in your council area, please visit: [www.nivco.co.uk](http://www.nivco.co.uk)**







# Serving and Ex-Serving Women's Network

## A Space to Connect

The Serving and Ex-Serving Women's Network was created a few years ago as a space for like minded women to come together socially and provide peer support. Originally launched on HMS Caroline, the network began as an experiment to see where it could go; and since then, it has grown steadily, with quarterly afternoon teas, occasional outings, and plenty of laughter and conversation.

Now, the Network has developed into a monthly hub. On the second Saturday of every month, women of all generations, serving and veteran, gather in Belfast for a friendly catch-up, a bit of peer support, and opportunities to connect with others who understand the unique experiences of military life.



A SESWN Get together in May 2025 - Its about craic, shared experiences & mindfulness

The first gathering in this new format took place on 13th September, and it was a real success.

Highlights included:

- The launch of the Serving and Ex-Serving Women's Network Book Club, supported by Reading Force
- A yoga class for those wanting to take a moment for themselves
- A crafting session led by the network's founder, Jen Robinson, offering a little mindfulness and creativity



The most recent September get together - pictured are the crafty ladies and their creations! Huge thank you to Jen for leading on a great afternoon of various activities.



All activities are light-hearted, welcoming, and supported; a chance to take a break from busy lives, whether you're balancing family, careers, or everything else.

The Network is open to all women veterans and service women, no matter when or where you served, from the Ulster Defence Regiment in the 1970s to more recent service in the Royal Navy. Everyone is welcome, and age doesn't matter. Often, gatherings are simply about enjoying a good cup of tea and a slice of cake, while sharing stories, support, and camaraderie.

If you would like to find out more about the Serving and Ex-Serving Women's Network, please get in touch with Jen Robinson via email or contact the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office to learn about future events.

This is a warm, welcoming space for women who've served, a little time for ourselves, a little fun, and a lot of connection.

**For more info on how to get involved or find out more:**  
**Email: [Jen@cw-ni.co.uk](mailto:Jen@cw-ni.co.uk)**  
**or**  
**[commissioner@nivco.co.uk](mailto:commissioner@nivco.co.uk)**





# Walking With The Wounded

## Supporting NI Veterans

At times, life after service can bring challenges that feel overwhelming. When a veteran is struggling, Walking With The Wounded's Support Care Coordination service is here to help. We work with ex-service personnel facing complex issues, offering tailored support to improve wellbeing and transform lives.

Our team provides practical and emotional support across a wide range of areas, including:

- Mental health, depression, anger, anxiety, and stress
- Employment and job opportunities
- Managing debt and financial challenges
- Accessing benefits and services
- Family and relationship difficulties
- Accommodation and housing needs
- Physical rehabilitation
- Loneliness and isolation
- Alcohol or drug misuse
- Education and qualifications
- Building confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth

Because of our strong partnerships with other organisations, we can bridge gaps in care and ensure veterans receive the right help at the right time. We don't just make referrals—we stay alongside our clients every step of the way.



Through Support Care Coordination, veterans can:

- Gain tools to manage mental health and develop healthier coping strategies
- Prioritise actions to make challenges feel more manageable
- Build confidence to discuss problems openly
- Learn to advocate for themselves and make positive choices
- Navigate complex systems and access the services they deserve
- Regain trust in support services and feel less alone

If you or someone you know is facing difficulties, please get in touch.

We are here to walk with you, every step of the way.

**For more info, contact:**

📞 **Louise McCreadie – 07516 502758**

🌐 **[walkingwiththewounded.org.uk](http://walkingwiththewounded.org.uk)**

## Veterans Welfare Service Northern Ireland (VWS NI)

The Veterans Welfare Service Northern Ireland (VWS NI) provides dedicated one-to-one support for veterans, their families, and dependants across Northern Ireland. With offices in Holywood and field teams in Coleraine, Portadown, and Enniskillen, the service ensures that no veteran faces challenges alone.

### What VWS NI Offers:

- Direct Welfare Support – Confidential, one-to-one guidance to help veterans and families address personal needs, build independence, and navigate everyday challenges.
- Psychological Support – Help in accessing counselling, therapy, and specialist services for issues such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, and the emotional impact of transition from service.
- Physical Rehabilitation – Assistance with physiotherapy, injury recovery, and long-term health conditions linked to service, ensuring veterans can maintain mobility, independence, and quality of life.
- Benevolent Support – Connecting veterans with funding sources, charities, and partner organisations to ease financial pressures.
- Practical Help – Guidance for navigating benefits, entitlements, housing, and bereavement support for families.



### Who Can Access Support:

- UK Armed Forces veterans
- Families and dependants of veterans

### How to Get in Touch:

- Main Office: 028 90 420 145
- Email: [dbsafvs-vws-ni@mod.gov.uk](mailto:dbsafvs-vws-ni@mod.gov.uk)

### Regional Teams:

- North (Coleraine): 028 92 260 615
- South (Portadown): 028 92 260 044
- East (Holywood): 028 90 420 266
- West (Enniskillen): 028 92 260 114

# ROAD MAP TO RECOVERY

## Roadmap to Recovery: August's Finale & New Beginnings

In August 2025 the Roadmap to Recovery programme came to a close, capped off in style with an activities day at Moorbrook Lodge, just outside Castlerock. The weather may have thrown a little wind and dampness at everyone, but spirits were high and the event was a fitting celebration of what has been achieved.

### What the Programme Was About

Set up two years ago, Roadmap to Recovery was built on peer support. Its aim: establish veteran support groups across Northern Ireland where former service personnel could meet people “who understand the language,” share experience, and help each other through the challenges of post service life. A core goal was that these groups would become self-sustaining once the programme officially ended.

### The Big Day at Moorbrook Lodge

The closing activities day had it all: fishing, bushcraft, archery, a great lunch, and plenty of crack. More than just fun, it was symbolic, the final seal to say, “You’re off, you’re on your way.” A demonstration that what’s been built can stand on its own.

### A Veteran’s Initiative: East Antrim Veterans Network

One participant who has particularly flourished is Paul Castle, from East Antrim. His involvement in Roadmap has inspired him to launch the East Antrim Veterans Network, a sub-hub group meeting at Jubilee Farm at Glynn (outside Larne).

Here, they are in early stages of creating a veterans garden and securing a safe, welcoming meeting place not just for those who were in the original Roadmap group, but for other veterans living locally. At the end of August, Paul officially launched the East Antrim Veterans Network. The event was honoured by the attendance of Councillor Jackson Minford, Mayor of Mid and East Antrim, and Mr David William McCorkell, Lord-Lieutenant for County Antrim. Even though it was windy and damp, the launch was a warm, hopeful occasion.

### Looking Forward

Roadmap to Recovery has ended in its formal sense, but its effects are alive—and growing. The East Antrim Veterans Network is proof of what can be achieved when veterans are given a foundation and some support, and then encouraged to build on it themselves.

We look forward to seeing how this group develops, and how others born from Roadmap will continue to flourish across Northern Ireland. In the months ahead we’ll be bringing news from other groups, what challenges they face, and what successes they celebrate.



NI veterans Commissioner David Johnstone & Road Map to Recovery Project Lead Michael Donaldson at the projects finale Activities Day – August 2025



A group photo of Road Map to Recovery Project participants – Moorbrook lodge August 2025



The East Antrim Veterans Network Launch in August 2025 with founder Paul Castle and Councillor Jackson Minford, Mayor of Mid and East Antrim, and Mr David William McCorkell, Lord-Lieutenant for County Antrim





## Podcast Spotlight: Once a Warrior, Life Beyond the Uniform

Earlier this year, the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner launched the podcast *Once a Warrior, Life Beyond the Uniform*. The aim of the podcast is simple but powerful: to sit down with real veterans from all conflicts and backgrounds, giving them the opportunity to share their experiences in service and to reflect on how they have adapted to life beyond the uniform.

This project has been truly eye-opening. The Commissioner has had the privilege of meeting and interviewing some remarkable individuals from a variety of backgrounds, services, and eras. Guests have included World War II veteran Captain John Gough, who participated in Operation Market Garden, and Ranger Anthony McToal, who joined the Army at 17 and was deployed to Afghanistan at just 19. In between, the podcast has featured veterans with experiences spanning the Falklands, Iraq, Northern Ireland, and much more.



Above: Captain John Gough of the Irish Guards sits down with NI Veterans Commissioner David Johnstone to talk about his time in service and afterwards.



Above: Anthony McToal aka The Cold Water Warrior sits down with the Commissioner to talk about his time in Afghanistan and what came next.

The podcast serves two important purposes: it provides veterans with a platform to tell their stories in their own words, and it also acts as a valuable record for history. It has been a genuine privilege to listen to these stories, capturing not only the challenges and achievements of service but also the lives veterans lead and the contributions they continue to make to society.

*Once a Warrior, Life Beyond the Uniform* is available on all major podcast platforms, including Apple, Spotify, Amazon, Podbean, YouTube, and via the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's website under the podcasts tab at [www.nivco.co.uk](http://www.nivco.co.uk).

We warmly invite you to tune in and discover these extraordinary stories of service, resilience, and life well lived.

**SUBSCRIBE NOW**

If you would like to tell your story, please get in touch with the Veterans Commissioner's Office by emailing: [commissioner@nivco.co.uk](mailto:commissioner@nivco.co.uk)



Above: Also taking part in the Podcast series is Jay the Barber! Jay is a Royal Irish veteran and he very candidly talks about his life, his faith and recovery from a near fatal head injury earlier this year - all whilst making a difference to communities experiencing difficulty here in NI.



# NI Veteran & Family Support

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

## Local Veteran Support

Veteran Welfare Service NI  
**E: [dbsafvs-vws-ni@mod.gov.uk](mailto:dbsafvs-vws-ni@mod.gov.uk)**  
**Tel: 02890 420145**

Northern Ireland Veterans  
Commissioner's Office  
**E: [commissioner@nivco.co.uk](mailto:commissioner@nivco.co.uk)**  
**Tel: 02825 483169**

Andy Allen Veteran Support NI  
**[www.aavsnl.com](http://www.aavsnl.com)**  
**Tel: 02890 747071**

Decorum NI  
**[www.decorumni.co.uk](http://www.decorumni.co.uk)**  
**Tel: 02891 457565**

Ely Centre  
**[www.elycentre.com](http://www.elycentre.com)**  
**Tel: 02866 320977**

Military & Police Support  
West Tyrone (MAPS)  
**[www.mapswesttyrone.org.uk](http://www.mapswesttyrone.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 02882 245459**

MUVE – Mid-Ulster Victims  
Empowerment  
**[www.muve.org.uk](http://www.muve.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 02886 763349**

Serving & Ex Serving Womens  
Network  
**E: [jen@cw-ni.co.uk](mailto:jen@cw-ni.co.uk)**  
**Tel: 07740580123**

South East Fermanagh  
Foundation  
**[www.seff.org.uk](http://www.seff.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 02867 723884**

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

Regenerate Veterans Group  
**Email: [regenerateveterans@outlook.com](mailto:regenerateveterans@outlook.com)**

## Veteran Health & Wellbeing

BLESMA –  
The Limbless Charity  
**[www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org)**  
**Tel: 0131 2262910**

Brooke House  
**[www.brookehouse.co.uk](http://www.brookehouse.co.uk)**  
**Tel: 02889 531223**

Combat Stress  
**[www.combatstress.org.uk](http://www.combatstress.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 02890 269990**

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

Help for Heroes  
**[www.helpforheroes.org.uk](http://www.helpforheroes.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 0300 3039888**

Inspire wellbeing  
**[www.inspirewellbeing.org](http://www.inspirewellbeing.org)**  
**Tel: 02890 328474**

Royal British Legion  
**[www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 0808 802808**  
Beyond the Battlefield  
**[www.beyondthebattlefield.org](http://www.beyondthebattlefield.org)**  
**Tel: 02891 228389**

Walking With The Wounded  
**[walkingwiththewounded.org.uk](http://walkingwiththewounded.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 01263 863900**

## Benevolence Funding & Finance

Army Benevolent Fund  
**[www.thesoldierscharity.org](http://www.thesoldierscharity.org)**  
**Tel: 02892 678112**

Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund  
**[www.rafbf.org](http://www.rafbf.org)**  
**Tel: 03001 021919**

Royal Navy &  
Royal Marines Charity  
**[www.rnrma.org.uk](http://www.rnrma.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 02393 871520**

SSAFA –  
The Armed Forces Charity  
**[www.ssafa.org.uk](http://www.ssafa.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 02890 327740**

UDR Benevolent Fund  
**[www.udrbenevolentfund.com](http://www.udrbenevolentfund.com)**  
**Tel: 07720 677838**

Make the Call  
**[www.nidirect.gov.uk/makethecall](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/makethecall)**  
**Tel: 0800 2321271**

## Pensions

Forces Pension Society  
**[www.forcespensionsociety.org](http://www.forcespensionsociety.org)**  
**Tel: 02078 209988**

Veterans UK  
**[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk)**  
**Tel: 0808 1914218**

## Jobs/Training

Forces Employment Charity  
**E: [a.sturgenor@forcesemployment.org.uk](mailto:a.sturgenor@forcesemployment.org.uk)**  
**Tel: 07805 725242**

## Legal Support

Reid Black Solicitors  
**[www.reidblack.com](http://www.reidblack.com)**  
**Tel: 02895 922744**