Welcome to the Winter 2019 edition of the Unforgotten Forces Newsletter. (Although, having said that, I am typing it in February in very balmy temperatures and under deep blue skies!) We are now just over half way through our three year project and by the end of 2018 had notched up just short of 6000 episodes of support for older veterans in Scotland providing them with services such as free transport for essential travel, advice about keeping their homes warm in winter, help with hearing loss, practical and emotional support before and after discharge from hospital, the joy of music and art, handyman help in the home, social support to counter loneliness and a great deal more besides. Much of this work has been delivered on a collaborative working basis between the various partner organisations in the consortium for which we are delighted to have been shortlisted as a finalist for the 2019 Soldiering On Awards in the “Working Together” category sponsored by the Forces in Mind Trust. This is an accolade we are very proud of and we have our fingers crossed in preparation for the announcement of the winners in London on Apr 5th. We are also delighted to announce that the Royal Air Forces Association has now joined the Unforgotten Forces consortium and been warmly welcomed as our 16th member. They are set to add even more strength in depth to our efforts in support of the older veterans’ community across Scotland. You can read all about some of this great work and all our news here. This edition of the newsletter includes the following features and news updates:
Royal Air Forces Association Joins Unforgotten Forces

Having recently joined Unforgotten Forces the RAF Association will undoubtedly add considerable heft to the consortium’s ability to support the approximately 12% of our older veteran clients who have served as either Regulars or Reservists in the RAF, the WRAF or in the Royal Auxiliary Air Force. In addition to the comradeship benefits provided through its network of Branches and their membership across Scotland, the Association also has approximately 200 trained Volunteer Caseworkers and 80 Befrienders in Scotland and NI alone. Additionally it delivers an extensive range of welfare services to support RAF veterans in areas such as financial support, social & friendship visits, retirement accommodation, advice and support with War Pensions and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, “Wings Breaks” at their own splendid holiday properties and much more besides. Further details about the RAF Association and its range of welfare services are available on their website via the following link: [https://www.rafa.org.uk/what-we-do/](https://www.rafa.org.uk/what-we-do/)
Volunteering opportunities to help older veterans with hearing loss.

Can you Volunteer?
Help us reach veterans who are deaf, have a hearing loss or tinnitus.

This is your opportunity to join our exciting new Hearing Forces project, which is providing support to veterans aged 65 and over who have hearing loss or tinnitus and their families and carers. You’ll provide life changing support to veterans, including hearing screening, information and hearing aid maintenance. You’ll also inform veterans about helpful equipment and signpost veterans to other services that can help them. It can take as little as 2 hours of your time per month to make a difference and you will receive ongoing support from both the project manager, your local coordinator and you’ll also learn new skills from local audiology services.

What skills would it be useful to have?
• Friendly, reliable and approachable manner.
• Awareness of, or willingness to learn about issues affecting deaf and hard of hearing people.
• Knowledge of or willingness to learn about veteran communities.
• Ability to listen to questions and to answer appropriately.
• Happy to work with a wide range of people especially the elderly.

To find out more, please email: hearing.forces@hearingloss.org.uk
Blind WWII Veteran regains love of reading with new gadgets provided by sight loss charity.

A 96-year-old veteran, who repaired spitfires and flew tiger moths during his service in the RAF in WW2, has regained his love of reading following receipt of specialist equipment, provided by Scottish War Blinded. Tom, of Dumfries and Galloway, has macular degeneration and his sight has now deteriorated to the point that he can no longer read. Macular Degeneration is the nation’s biggest cause of sight loss and mostly affects older people. Living alone, it meant that reading post and personal documents was a real struggle for Tom. He found this was eating away at his independence, as he felt reliant on his daughter visiting to access his correspondence.

But now with the help of an EasyRead 2 - a specialist piece of sight loss equipment given to Tom by Scottish War Blinded - the RAF veteran is overcoming these challenges. The clever gadget is able to process and read aloud any document Tom places underneath its scanner within seconds. And together with a USB player he has also received from the charity, to play audio books, the avid reader is delighted to be regaining independence at home and enjoying one of his favourite pastimes again.

Tom said: “The EasyRead 2 has been marvellous. I can now read letters. It amazes me how a machine can read something and say it out loud to you. It can be things I’ve received through the post and letters from the bank. I used to have to wait a few days until my daughter could come and read my mail to me”.

“The USB player amazes me too – it’s so convenient. I can take it out with me to sit in the garden and listen to my books. It’s fantastic.”

Tom was assessed by Scottish War Blinded Rehabilitation Worker Sharon McAllister, who worked closely with him at home to determine what specialist equipment would suit him best. He has also seen a huge difference in life at home thanks to a number of other items, all provided free-of-charge by Scottish
War Blinded, including a talking clock, a one-cup hot water dispenser and stickers to help around the kitchen.

Tom recounts: “When I was diagnosed with macular degeneration, the specialist told me there were three things I’d no longer be able to do: drive, read or watch television. I’d thought if I could have one out of those three I would pick reading. But I’d always thought of that in the context of enjoying a book or a magazine”.

“What started getting more difficult was that I couldn’t do any shopping because I couldn’t read what was on the packets, and I couldn’t read my post.”

In addition to support from the rehabilitation team, Scottish War Blinded’s Outreach Worker for Dumfries and Galloway, Mick Seed, organises monthly lunch meet ups with Tom and a group of veterans.

The father-of-two and grandfather-of-two joined the RAF in 1940 just after his 18th birthday, and served for five years. He served as a navigator and flight engineer, and has very fond memories of his flight training days in Canada before returning to be based across Scotland during the war.

He piloted tiger moths, and recalls his first training flight was in Canada, where he flew over Niagara Falls. Tom recalls being on stand-by along with his crew to support the American bombing of Japan – and thankfully not being required.

“I consider myself to be one of the lucky ones,” Thomas said.

Scottish War Blinded supports veterans with sight loss, irrespective of cause, refers veterans to Unforgotten Forces partners for additional support. If you work with a veteran who would benefit please call 0800 035 6409 to make a referral.

Scottish War Blinded for all veterans with sight loss
Vision Hub: Sight loss charities unite to host free vision impairment advice hub in Hawick

Residents with sight loss in the Scottish Borders will have the opportunity to receive expert advice at a free vision impairment event this month.

Two organisations providing support for those with sight loss in the Scottish Borders will come together in Hawick to host ‘Vision Hub’ on Wednesday, March 20, at Hawick Town Hall. Doors will be open from 10.30am to 2pm.

At Vision Hub, local representatives from Scottish War Blinded and Macular Society, as well as a number of other guest exhibitors, will offer specialist advice to visitors on how each service can help people with sight loss to continue living as independently as possible. Representatives from Borders Council Sensory and Low Vision Services, Guide Dogs, Borders Talking Newspaper, Borders Carers Centre and RNIB will also be present at the event.

Whether you have sight loss yourself, or you care for someone who does, anyone affected by a sight condition is welcome to drop in, meet the experts and find out what kind of support is available. The event will be an opportunity to meet others with sight loss and share experiences and tips.

Scottish War Blinded Outreach Worker for the Scottish Borders, Dawn Smith, organises lunch groups for military veterans in the area, as well as support for individuals at home. She will be on hand to explain how she can help more veterans adapt to sight loss. The charity supports veterans with sight loss in Scotland, no matter when or how they lost their sight. At the event, rehabilitation officers from Scottish War Blinded will also demonstrate a range of specialist equipment, which is available free of charge to military veterans with significant sight loss.
The Macular Society's Regional Manager, Laura Gray, will share information on services and practical support available in the local community, including the Information and Advice service, telephone counselling service, volunteer run services and support groups.

Rebecca Barr, Director of Scottish War Blinded, commented: “We are delighted to link up with Macular Society to showcase the varied support on offer to those affected by sight loss in the Scottish Borders. When it comes to a sight loss condition everyone’s experience is different, and we look forward to meeting visitors at Vision Hub to ensure they are getting the best, most appropriate support available to them.”

The event will take place on Wednesday, March 20, at Hawick Town Hall. Doors will be open from 10.30am to 2pm. Tea and light refreshments will also be on offer free of charge.

Call Dawn Smith, Scottish War Blinded Outreach Worker, for more information on 07584 632 605 or email: dawn.smith@scottishwarblinded.org

‘Over the Moon!’ Feedback on the ASAP Service

This is how one ASAP Unforgotten Forces client described their recent experience of the service. Following the death of her husband who was a veteran, the older client found that she was struggling financially due to the change in circumstances. She contacted ASAP’s Unforgotten Forces adviser to see if we could help. While an initial benefits check established that she was in full receipt of the benefits that she was entitled to, she happened to mention some physical health issues to the adviser. This prompted him to look into the possibility of Attendance Allowance for the client, which he was delighted to find was awarded at the high rate. The client said that she was ‘over the moon’ about the award and that it would make such a difference to her financial situation.

This was just one of the older clients that ASAP has managed to help through the Unforgotten Forces project. We have helped clients from across Scotland, ranging from the very far north down to Dumfries & Galloway, working closely
with other ASAP and CAB staff. Pictured are our ASAP and Unforgotten Forces advisers from East Renfrewshire, Mark and Emma. Another adviser in the Central Belt said that ‘while we already knew some of the partners, Unforgotten Forces has allowed us to access services such as free taxis and support in the health system that we didn’t have links with before – this has been a huge benefit for clients.’ For more information click here: Armed Services Advice Project – Citizens’ Advice Bureaux Call: 0808 800 1007 To find your regional contact please click here

Erskine Reid Macewan Activity Centre’s First Birthday

It’s been one year since the Erskine Reid Macewen Activity Centre (ERMAC) opened on Erskine’s Veterans Village in Bishopton. Debs Dickson, the centre’s manager, said “Thank you to all who attended our birthday celebrations. Since the doors first opened on the 15th January 2018 we have delivered over 1,600 activity sessions including woodwork, art, holistic therapy, boxing, bowls, archery, IT and genealogy with over 5,000 attendances. From an initial 15 Veterans who indicated an interest, there are now 109 members registered ranging in age from 37 to 94”. Attending the centre has had a big impact on people’s lives like Army Veteran Billy McPike who said: “I never had much human contact when sitting at home and was starting to get depressed. Then I came here and it’s turned my life around. It’s a fantastic place where I’ve had the best few months I’ve had for a long, long time.” Erskine is delighted to announce that its trustees have now given permission to identify other venues and locations across Scotland where there are veterans who could benefit from an Erskine Activity Centre.

WW2 Royal Navy and Arctic Convoys Veteran Barney Roberts at the event reading his moving poem about how ERMAC has made a difference to his life.
Debs also stated “We would like to acknowledge the support we have received from Unforgotten Forces partners in the past year, in working together we have enhanced the services we offer our members as well as extending our reach by letting veterans in the community know that we are here and what we have to offer. A particular thanks goes to eight of the partners with whom we have regular direct contact with either through joint service delivery or referrals - Fares 4 Free, SSAFA, ASAP, Action on Hearing Loss Scotland, Music in Hospitals & Care Scotland, Scottish War Blinded, DMWS & Legion Scotland.

The Scottish Older People's Assembly (SOPA)

Unforgotten Forces partner organisation the Scottish Older People's Assembly exists to give a strong voice to older people about their experience of life in Scotland, their challenges and concerns, and to celebrate the positive contribution that older people make to society.

SOPA has over 30 membership organisations including community groups, national campaigns and organisations, equality and minority groups and lifelong learning associations along with individual members. The combined reach of these members is estimated to be 40,000 older people across Scotland, many of whom are affected by ill-health, come from disadvantaged and diverse backgrounds, and who often feel excluded from decision making.

SOPA aims to enable and empower members to use their experience and skills to influence policy decisions that affect later life. Members are encouraged to feedback from national groups and forums to their wider networks of older people, creating a powerful network of engagement.

Since 2009 SOPA has delivered nine national assemblies and over 60 local meetings enabling us to influence decision makers on issues important to older
people, including funeral and fuel poverty, housing, transport, health and social care, active ageing, human rights and many other topics.

Members are frequently invited to participate in consultation and engagement activities by the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament and other national and local bodies.

SOPA is currently working with Unforgotten Forces partners to arrange a joint event with veterans in early June 2019. The views and information captured from this event will feed into the SOPA Assembly which is being planned to take place at the Scottish Parliament in October 2019.

For further information visit: [www.scotopa.org.uk](http://www.scotopa.org.uk).

**Advice for older veterans in Scotland is free and easy**

Later life can bring big changes - sometimes bigger than the changes veterans experience moving from military to civilian life. If your health deteriorates, your home no longer meets your needs, you become socially isolated or your financial situation worsens, it can be hard to know where to turn. The Age Scotland Veterans’ Project is working with its Unforgotten Forces partners to address that through the publication of free advice guides for older veterans who, along with their friends and family members, can call us on 0800 12 44 222 or email publications@agescotland.org.uk to request one or more postal copies. These guides are also available online at: [www.agescotland.org.uk/veterans](http://www.agescotland.org.uk/veterans).

‘The Veterans’ Guide to Later Life’ tells you about your rights and support entitlements, as both an older person and a veteran, on topics including health, money, transport and care. Older veterans have welcomed it: of the dozens that send feedback postcards to us 24 percent found it ‘essential’, 68 percent ‘very useful’ and ‘8 percent ‘useful’. One called it “a fantastic booklet full of great information.” Another wished they’d “had it in 1974 when I got demobbed and ended up in tatty squads for three years!” Many told us much of the information was new to them, and valued having so many contacts in one guide. This January we published ‘Combating Sight and Hearing Loss’, a guide to help older veterans spot problems with eyesight and hearing - and get help –
early. We’re proud to have developed it with our Unforgotten Forces partners Scottish War Blinded and Action on Hearing Loss. Even hotter off the press is ‘Housing for Older Veterans’. This guide, which was developed in partnership with Housing Options Scotland’s Military Matters Project, explains veterans’ housing options as they get older, from help to make a current home more suitable, to moving to a new home. We ensure all our guides for older veterans are available in audio format, provided in USB stick format on request.

Scottish Veterans Commissioner Charlie Wallace has welcomed our 2019 publications, calling them “practical guides which provide a wealth of information for older veterans.” He also celebrated the collaboration behind them as “a great example of what can be achieved when organisations work together, pooling their knowledge and expertise: something I am keen to see more of.”

Of course no guide has all the answers, which is why Age Scotland continues to develop the skills and knowledge of the Age Scotland helpline team so they are able to give the best possible advice to older veterans and their dependants who call 0800 12 44 222. Where we don’t have the answer we can find someone who does, making frequent referrals to our partners in Unforgotten Forces.
News from the Defence Medical Welfare Service

Lanarkshire DMWS in Lanarkshire are delighted to confirm that additional funding has been secured through NHS Lanarkshire to fund our services through to July 2020. This is positive news for all Lanarkshire veterans and will allow and encourage further awareness and expansion of the current service provision. DMWS and our local consortium partners continue and look forward to providing support to older veterans and their families in the coming months.

Pictured right here are Gemma Blair, NHS Lanarkshire Operational Admin Manager for the Care of the Elderly Directorate with DMWS Welfare officer in Lanarkshire, Kenny Cumming. Gemma said, ‘we are delighted that DMWS have secured the necessary funding to continue their work within Lanarkshire. Since summer 2017 this has proven to be a valuable service for veterans on the medical pathway; we look forward to working in partnership with DMWS in the coming months’.

Grampian John Shaw has recently joined the DMWS Team and comes from a social work background having spent the last 20 years working within Residential care and as a Social Worker Team Leader in Aberdeenshire for an Intensive Support Service. John served with the RAF Regiment for 6 years and with the Gordons TA for 8 years and his hobbies include serving as an Army Cadet Force Instructor. “I have always been interested with working with veterans and being part of the helping team that ensures they are looked after and get the support they deserve. I am looking forward to my new role and meeting and working with all partners from the unforgotten Forces consortium along with other organisations concerned with health and care for older veterans”.

Gemma Blair and Kenny Cumming
Ayrshire and Arran - Scottish Veterans Minister Meets Military Veterans
Project Making Positive Changes

In a visit led by the DMWS team, Scottish Veterans’ Minister, Graeme Dey MSP, met with attendees of Ayrshire Veterans Breakfast Club, at the Melbourne Café, followed by a visit to the Unforgotten Forces consortium at Poppyscotland’s Welfare Drop In Centre in Kilmarnock.

Following the launch of the UK-wide Strategy ‘For Our Veterans’; the Minister has been widely consulting with the veteran community. The strategy sets out the vision, principles and aims which will drive support for veterans in the future. This visit was an opportunity to hear how DMWS has helped to make sustained positive change to the armed forces community in Scotland, as part of the Unforgotten Forces consortium.

DMWS is a key member of the consortium, often reaching those in need at the immediate point of crisis within NHS medical centres and hospital wards. DMWS Welfare Officers deliver a bespoke medical welfare service to veterans aged 65 and over, their families and carers in Scotland. This unique service also includes work in the community, where the Ayrshire Veterans Breakfast Club is a regular place to provide direct support and referrals to other agencies.

Robert Reid, Area Manager said: “I am a veteran myself and know first-hand that our armed forces are frequently exposed to distressing sights and experiences
on deployment, and may have sustained injuries or medical conditions related to their Service.”

“The ministerial visit provided an opportunity for our veterans to discuss their experiences past and present, and the impact it has had on their lives. Being able to speak to Mr Dey directly about what support is being provided Scotland-wide to assist the significant number of ex-service personnel, was a wonderful opportunity.”

Mr Dey later met with other partners in the Unforgotten Forces consortium at the Poppyscotland Welfare Drop In Centre in Kilmarnock. The meeting gave an insightful portrayal of the charitable work that is being done to help older veterans and the schemes that are making a real difference to the quality of life for older veterans.

Mr Dey said: “Scotland has a long and very proud military tradition. Our Armed Forces and Veterans Community are assets to our society and I want to ensure that their service is properly acknowledged and that they are well supported and looked after. I am pleased to have been able to join in the Veterans Breakfast this morning and visit Poppyscotland’s Welfare Centre with the Defence Medical Welfare Service to learn more about the excellent work they do to support our veterans’ community.”

Paul Gaffney, Chief Executive Officer at DMWS, comments, “We are delighted that Mr Dey met with the team, which sent a really positive message of support to the Unforgotten Forces programme. The ministerial visit highlights Scottish Governments commitment to the needs of the armed forces and veterans community and the requirement to ensure that those who have served their country are placed at the forefront of veterans’ policy thinking, development and delivery.”
Veterans enjoy a fabulous festive lunch courtesy of the Not Forgotten Association.

Eight older veterans and spouses who have received support from partners in the Unforgotten Forces project enjoyed a fabulous Christmas lunch courtesy of the Not Forgotten Association at the swanky Dalmahoy Hotel & Country Club near Edinburgh on Mon 10th Dec last year. The Not Forgotten Forces Association provides recreation, leisure and entertainment to serving personnel and veterans of any age across the UK. Almost 150 veterans and a small number of serving Royal Marines from across Scotland attended the lunch.

Following welcome drinks in the cocktail bar the party moved to the Dalmahoy Suite where a splendid three course Christmas luncheon was served with all the trimmings. Entertainment was provided by “The Swingtime Sweethearts”, a delightful duo of cheery, chatty chanteuses who adeptly compared the proceedings and quickly warmed up the audience with medley of old favourite military and wartime songs including “It’s a long way to Tipperary” and “Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag”! The veterans were soon singing along and having a great time, and even dancing the conga around the room!

Many of those attending were from Service and Regimental Association branches and Veterans’ Clubs and knew each other well. Others however, including those invited by the Unforgotten Forces partners, had come individually or in pairs but they quickly made new friends and enjoyed the convivial company of other like-minded ex servicemen and women. Unforgotten Forces partners including Poppyscotland, Legion Scotland, the Defence Medical Welfare Service and the Armed Services Advice Project had brought along a “tri-service” group of veterans of the Royal Navy, the Army and RAF. Facilitating this
type of social opportunity for older veterans is very much in line with the aims of the Unforgotten Forces project which, in addition to providing a range of practical support services and advice, also works hard to counter loneliness and social isolation where it exists amongst older veterans. Many thanks to the Not Forgotten Association for laying on this very special occasion.

CONTACT THE ELDERLY – TACKLING LONELINESS & SOCIAL ISOLATION

Contact the Elderly is the national charity dedicated to tackling loneliness and social isolation amongst older people living in the United Kingdom and whose mission is to empower older people to make new social connections, and break out of the cycle of social isolation. Although not a member of the Unforgotten Forces consortium we have good links with them and their service definitely has the potential to benefit many more older military veterans.

Supported by a nationwide network of over 11,000 volunteers, Contact the Elderly organises free monthly social events for small groups of isolated older people. They provide a group activity that encourages:

- Inter-generational links
- Friendships to develop between older group members and volunteers

Their groups:

- Operate at weekends, when most community services for older people are not available. Moreover, Sunday has been highlighted as being a particularly lonely day of the week for their guests.
- Are kept purposely small, and they meet in the welcoming environment of someone’s home.

More information is available on their website at:

https://www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk/
Play it Again SAV! – What veterans have said about it.

Music In Hospitals & Care Scotland’s “Play it again SAV!” project is one of the Unforgotten Forces project’s two Arts Engagement initiatives for older veterans. (The other being Luminate’s art and sculpture project for residents at Erskine’s homes in Glasgow and Edinburgh). Over the last 20 months they have been working with other consortium partners providing the joy of live music of various types and thereby improving the quality of life for hundreds of older veterans at a variety of locations including at Veterans’ Clubs, at Scottish War Blinded’s Activity Centres, Erskine’s Reid Macewan Centre and in NHS hospital wards. Feedback from the older veterans after these sessions has been very positive and has included the following:

“It was really excellent. The music was lovely and suited the afternoon.”

“Brought some life back into me.”

“Absolute magic! Wonderful hour of entertainment!”

"When are they coming back?";

"That brought back memories."; "Had a great day."; "He's back to his old self."

“It’s great to be able to have a dance, especially on a day like this.”

“Really enjoyed the company and interaction. The sun shines for me when I come here.”

“Ward 5D was the happiest place to be in Crosshouse yesterday.”; “You had to see it to believe the joy in the faces of these patients and family.”
For further information about the services available for older veterans via the Unforgotten Forces project and how to make referrals for support and advice to any of the partner organisations please visit the Poppyscotland website via the following link:

http://www.poppyscotland.org.uk/get-help/unforgotten-forces/

For any general and policy related enquiries about the project, or if you would like copies of our hard copy leaflet, a face to face presentation for your clients and staff team, or wish any further information please contact the Unforgotten Forces Coordinator, Glen MacDonald (that’s not me on the right by the way!), via:

E mail: g.macdonald@poppyscotland.org.uk
or Tel: 07458 014362.

We look forward to hearing from you!