

NEW FRONTIERS



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**Scotland's
Veterans
Wellbeing
Alliance**

THRIVE TOGETHER

Empowering Veterans and Families:
Creating Connections, Building Futures

Welcome to the first edition of our newsletter New Frontiers and updates to the work of Scotland's Veterans Wellbeing Alliance.

I am delighted to see the progress we have made since we carried out conversations across Scotland last summer to find out what was important to veterans and their families who had chosen to return to Scottish civilian life or make a new life in Scotland following their service. The invaluable insights gained from our **Fingerprints** dialogue enabled us to create our three year strategy for the Alliance, secure funding from the **Armed Forces Community Covenant Trust** and grow the number of partners all committed to delivering on the aims of the strategy.

We have spent the last few months getting to know one another and the work that our organisations do to support veterans. We currently have 29 active partners whose activities are all aligned with our strategic goals. We are continuing to reach out to the many organisations and public sector services in Scotland working with veterans to join us so that we can together address key issues that veterans raised with us including their frustration at having to tell their stories over and over again and not knowing about the opportunities and support available to veterans and their families. The development of our Alliance website by partner **Health in Mind** and the creation of our new podcast series by **Bespoken Media** will go some way to addressing these issues.

Our dialogue did not stop last summer the Alliance is committed to ensuring that veterans voices are driving the changes needed and we are delighted that partner agency **CAPS** have just recruited a full-time collective advocacy worker who will be bringing together veterans across Scotland: A huge welcome to Steven Cockburn, please do reach out to Steven who is planning to establish the Veterans collective advocacy group by August. You can contact him here: steven@capsadvocacy.org

New Frontiers will be issued every two months, and the deadline and publication dates are set out on the back page. My hope is that we can include articles highlighting the work and activities of Alliance partners; thought and opinion articles are also welcome too! Our first edition has a couple of feature articles by **Pauline Cherrington** on the awe-inspiring work that **Lothian Veterans Centre** is doing with female veterans and one from our roving development and outreach lead **Richard Henderson** on his recent visit with **Professor Gerri Matthews-Smith** to Lewis.

I hope you enjoy reading this and do please send any contributions to me at l.irvinefitzpatrick@napier.ac.uk

Our partners

We are delighted to be working with such a wide and diverse range of partners across Scotland and we hope to grow this over the coming months, if you are interested in finding out more about the Alliance or joining us as a partner please do get in touch.

Age Scotland	Fighting with Pride	Social Value Engine
Bespoken Spoken Media	Health in Mind	Stand Easy
Bravehound	Help for Heroes	The Jounrey
CAPS Collective Advocacy	Lothian Veterans Centre	The Jounrey Yoga
Care After Combat	Phiannas Partnership	Thistle Foundation
Community Veteran Support	RFH Solutions	Vector 24
Cyrenians	Rock to Recovery	Veterans Chaplaincy
Defence Garden Scheme	Sacro	Veterans Tribe Scotland
Defence Medical Welfare Service	Scottish Veterans Residencies	Walking with the Wounded
	Sight Scotland	Warhead Project UK

And we hope more to come!

Thank you for your Service

Pauline Cherrington writes about the recent trip that Lothian Veterans Centre's female veterans made to Liverpool



LVC has been breaking down barriers to ensure female veterans get appropriate support by putting on events and activities that are appealing and accessible to them.

Research by a number of authorities such as **Combat Stress**, the **WRAC Association** and **Robert Gordon University** has highlighted how female veterans face challenges specific to being a woman during military service in a male-dominated environment, not least, **Military Sexual Trauma (MST)** which is considered to be the leading cause of PTSD among female veterans. The recent news articles about the inquest into the suicide of a young female soldier shows that MST remains prevalent today and that servicewomen are still being disproportionately affected by it. It can cause anxiety, depression, eating disorders, chronic pain, suicidal ideation and it impacts on parent/child bonding. For some women traumatic experiences during service were minimised and invalidated and they were reluctant to speak out due to potential consequences on their careers, not being believed or taken seriously, or the chain of command not acting appropriately.

Female veterans of working age are more likely to have mental health issues than male veterans, and they tend to have lower incomes due to part-time working and childcare issues. The ongoing cost-of-living crisis is an added stressor as it exacerbates issues with low and fixed incomes and childcare costs. Ex-servicewomen are also less likely to identify as veterans and seek help as their male counterparts and can struggle with having to adopt a new identity when leaving the Armed Forces. Additionally, many female veterans feel that the public does not fully understand or recognise their service which can have a lasting negative impact, particularly on those with health conditions, injuries and disabilities relating to combat or service.

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Add to this the fact that ex-servicewomen are often inhibited from seeking help from the veterans' sector because of sexism, fear of risk of further harm or trauma and concerns that they will not fit in, feel comfortable, listened to, understood or taken seriously in environments that retain a male-dominated military culture where unacceptable behaviour can still be dismissed as '*banter*' or '*just the way it is*'. Existing services can be unappealing to ex-servicewomen as they are often staffed and attended by men, with little to no safeguarding arrangements or childcare provisions. Some female veterans understandably do not have faith that their distinct and compelling needs will be met within existing veterans' services and, unsurprisingly, opt instead to seek help outwith the veterans' sector or do not seek help at all which further impacts on their mental and physical health and relationships.

The factors outlined above highlight some of the compelling and enduring issues for female veterans that have often gone unnoticed, been sidelined, ignored or not fully understood, but that have and continue to severely impact the mental and physical health of female veterans and their relationships.

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Our events and activities are designed to make ex-servicewomen feel welcome and confident that their distinct needs will be met empathetically in a safe environment. One such event was a trip to Liverpool in the week leading up to International Women's Day on Saturday 8th March.

Throughout the trip the sun shone, there was talking, confiding, understanding, listening, some singing and much laughter...

The 4-day trip was organised primarily so that a tri-service group of ex-servicewomen could meet other female veterans from the **'Stand By Her'** project at **Everton in the Community** and share experiences. The women from the **Stand By Her Project** went above and beyond to make us feel welcome and we had a tour of Everton FC's stadium at Goodison Park before having some tea and biscuits at The Captain's Table. Following that, we had the opportunity to see firsthand some of the impressive projects that Everton in the Community organise for local people and to meet some of the beneficiaries.

As part of the trip, we had an organised tour of the Western Approaches Museum where we learned about how the **WRNS, ATS and WAAF of WATU** helped win the Battle of the Atlantic during WWII. We also visited the Wrens Museum inside. It was a real honour to hear about the outstanding efforts of our predecessors and celebrate their selfless contribution to the war effort.

Of course, a trip to Liverpool would not have been complete without an obligatory voyage on a ferry across the Mersey and a visit to the Cavern Club to see a Beatles tribute band.

In recognition of our service, we were treated to free cocktails and free entry into the Cavern Club as well as discounted tickets for the ferry and The British Music Experience. In fact, we were quite the celebrities in our hot pink hoodies and were recognised, celebrated and thanked for our service many times. This was quite an achievement for our group of ex-servicewomen, who are often overlooked in favour of their male counterparts, as it provided a real opportunity for the group to make a positive impact on the societal representation of a veteran. We come in different guises and don't all wear blazers and ties!

The group relished the opportunity to bond, share stories of their service and take pride in being part of a privileged community during the trip. Life has been challenging for everyone in the group and this time away from everyday stressors and strains gave them a chance to share their worries and stresses. One female veteran commented, *"I had not realised how much I would get from the trip, and indeed all the ladies who attended said the same thing. We all have issues or struggles but worries are reduced just by talking about them, and coming together as a group in our bright pink hoodies was uplifting. So many people stopping and asking what and who we were, and we were able to explain to them with a sense of pride that we were Veterans, Female Veterans."*

I was a Warrant Officer in the Army and served for 22 years but this is often forgotten, I reflect some days and wonder, was that really me? However, the trip was about reminiscing, swapping tales, from the uniforms we wore, the boundaries we tried to push and the fight at times we had to be accepted and treated as equals. Throughout the trip the sun shone, there was talking, confiding, understanding, listening, some singing and much laughter. This trip was about making memories and making friends. Both of these boxes have been well and truly ticked!"

Learning that actually changes things

Karen McNeil from Phiannis Partnership summarises our approach to learning

Traditional approaches often treat learning as something that happens afterwards- once the work is finished -but by then, it's often too late to shape what really matters.

In these approaches to learning, people reflect on what went wrong or what could have gone better, but much of the detail is lost with time, and the chance to make real improvements is missed. SVWA takes a different view: it sees learning as something that needs to happen during the work, not just after it. It's not enough to write up lessons learned- it's about capturing lived experiences, understanding them properly, and making sense of them while they're still fresh and usefull.

The SVWA approach to learning puts a strong focus on learning in the present - what's happening now, and what it's telling us.

This means looking closely at real situations, listening to people's experiences, and spotting patterns as they emerge. Rather than waiting for problems to grow, teams come together in Learning Labs to share what they're noticing and reflect on it together. These are safe spaces for honest conversations - not about blame, but about collective understanding and sensemaking. By making time to learn in the moment, the approach helps people respond better, agree collective actions and make changes that are more likely to work.

Looking ahead, the SVWA approach supports learning that helps shape what comes next - not just reflect and having the same conversation over and over on what's happened.

It encourages teams to think early on about what they want to learn and why, then to try things out, adjust, and keep learning as they go. This kind of forward-looking learning means we don't have to wait for everything to go wrong before we change course. Instead, we test ideas in small ways, learn quickly, and adapt with confidence. Crucially, what is learned locally can be shared across the wider system- helping others avoid the same pitfalls and giving policymakers real, grounded insight into what's working and what needs to change. In this way, learning doesn't just stay at the front line - it travels, shapes decisions, and influences the conditions needed for wider system change.

Remembering and reflecting

Professor Gerri Matthews,
Director, Centre for Military
Research Education and
Public Engagement



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Of course, many people in Britain didn't wait for the official day of celebration and began the festivities as soon as they heard the news on 7 May. After years of wartime restrictions and dangers – from food and clothes rationing to blackouts and bombing raids – it was understandable how eager folks were to finally be able to let loose and enjoy themselves. Colourful bunting and flags soon lined the streets of villages, towns and cities across Britain. On the eve of VE Day, bonfires were lit, people danced and the pubs were full of revellers.

A national holiday was declared in Britain for 8 May 1945. Various events were organised to mark the occasion, including parades, thanksgiving services and street parties. Communities came together to share the moment announced by Winston Churchill who was the man of the hour on VE Day. Britain's Prime Minister had been a major driving force behind the Allies' victory over Nazi Germany and, now that peace had come, the British people were keen to celebrate it with him.

At 3pm on VE Day, Churchill made a national radio broadcast. In it, he announced the welcome news that the war had ended in Europe – but he included a note of caution, saying:

'We may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing; but let us not forget for a moment the toil and efforts that lie ahead.'

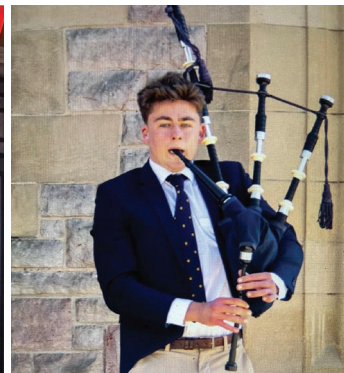
The British Royal Family also played a central role in London's victory celebrations. Huge numbers of people surged down The Mall to Buckingham Palace, where King George VI, Queen Elizabeth and their daughters, Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret, soon appeared on the balcony to wave to the cheering crowds. While the King and Queen were waving to the crowds for the last time that evening, their daughters were secretly mingling with the jubilant crowds below them.. Princess Elizabeth later recalled, *'We stood outside and shouted, "We want the King"... I think it was one of the most memorable nights of my life.'*

King George VI, like Churchill, also gave a radio address. In it, he praised his subjects' endurance and called for a lasting peace. He also paid tribute to those who could not join in the celebrations, saying: *'Let us remember those who will not come back...let us remember the men in all the services, and the women in all the services, who have laid down their lives. We have come to the end of our tribulation and they are not with us at the moment of our rejoicing.'*

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It was in that spirit that the Centre invited veterans, colleagues and partners to join our "Street Party" Craiglockhart Campus on 8 May.

It was especially poignant that this took place in what had been a World War One hospital where the Doctors Rivers and Brock developed pioneering approaches for officers suffering from shell shock. Two of these officers, Wilfred Owens and Siegfried Sassoon wrote poems there which are still recited and taught across the world. It was only fitting that we began our street party with poetry recited by two pupils from **Firrhill High School** and from actors from the Leith based **Strange Twon Theatre Company**.



Following this our catering staff at Napier served a wonderful and tasty lunch to the accompaniment of Glen Miller tunes. The Rivers Suite was transformed into a wonderful creative space by Alliance partner **Veterans Tribe Scotland** and **Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust** where participants were invited to make momentos ranging from wind chimes, to painted stones and flower posies.

It truly was a day of remembrance and reflection, reminding us all of our shared humanity.

Stories of resilience and connection: A special visit to Lewis



Gerri and Richard joined by Katie from Bespoken Media capturing stories for our pod cast

Our latest visit to Lewis wasn't just about sharing a meal — it was about sharing stories, experiences, and strengthening the bonds that make this community so special. Alongside our breakfast club gathering, we had the privilege of conducting interviews for our upcoming podcast, and let's just say, the conversations were nothing short of extraordinary.

Conversations flowed, laughter echoed through the room, and new friendships were formed over cups of tea and plates of food

Richard Henderson, the Alliance's out and about development lead paid a visit to Lewis with Professor Gerri Matthews-Smith, Director of the Centre for Military Research, Education and Public Engagement at Edinburgh Napier University.

This visit enabled us to reconnect with veterans we met during last year's "Fingerprints" conversations.

Not only did we see familiar faces, but we also welcomed veterans, partners and children who had never attended before. Some had never met each other, proving once again how powerful community connections can be when given the right space to grow. Conversations flowed, laughter echoed through the room, and new friendships were formed over cups of tea and plates of food.

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One particularly powerful story came from a Lieutenant Colonel who had transitioned out of service just six weeks ago. His military career spanned theatres across the globe, and hearing about his journey—from battlefield to civilian life—was eye-opening. Equally moving was the conversation with his wife, who shared her perspective on the transition. She made the decision to remain on the island with their children, prioritising stability and the strong support network that Lewis offers.

It was also fantastic to hear from veterans who are now working with the local cadets, returning to service in a new way and finding fresh purpose. They spoke warmly of how rewarding it is to mentor young people and stay connected to the values they hold dear.

The island's commitment to its veterans was evident everywhere. Notices in shops, cafés, and supermarkets offered support, recognizing that not everyone relies on the internet and ensuring that no one in the community is left behind.

Yet, despite this strong community spirit, the rising cost of living continues to hit hard and veterans on Lewis are no exception. For some, affording the ferry to the mainland has become increasingly difficult, as prices climb without subsidies to ease the burden. Even travel across the island poses challenges, with some veterans receiving lifts from Ness to Lewis simply because they couldn't afford the 32-mile round trip for breakfast.

Perhaps the most poignant conversation was with a veteran who has been back on Lewis for 18 months, a decision he credits with saving his life. After struggling with employment and mental health following his departure from the Army, he found himself in a difficult place. Prison, loneliness, uncertainty. But returning to Lewis gave him something invaluable: acceptance.

"There's nowhere lonelier than a city," he told us. "Up here, the guys know my story. They look out for me. They don't hassle me, don't crowd me—but they'll give me a bell if they're heading out to watch a game or go for a brew."

**And that's the heart of it.
A community that
understands, supports,
and lifts each other up.**

This visit reminded us why these connections matter, and why we'll keep listening, learning, and bringing people together—one story, one conversation, and one breakfast at a time.

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Lewis's history of resilience stretches far beyond today. The island carries the weight of sacrifices made in past conflicts, marking moments of deep loss and unwavering courage.

If the ratio of those killed to the total population (29,603, according to the 1911 Census) is considered, it's evident that Lewis bore an immense cost—losing men at twice the rate of the rest of the British Isles.

Throughout Stornoway and beyond, memorials stand as solemn reminders of these sacrifices. One of the most poignant tributes overlooks the **Beasts of Holm**, commemorating the tragedy of New Year's Day 1919, when 181 island sailors perished along with several crew members of **HMY Iolaire** as the vessel grounded and sank just before reaching home.

Other memorials speak to the island's enduring military legacy: the familiar cairn outside the **Drill Hall** remembers the Ross Battery, while the **Seaforth Highlanders** plaque on the old Clock School tower has stood since 1923.

The **Nicolson Institute** bears two plaques in memory of former pupils lost in war, and churches across the island, from the High Church to St Peter's, pay tribute to those who once sat among their congregations before making the ultimate sacrifice.

More recently, the communities of Melbost and Branahue came together to erect a new war memorial, positioned opposite the former gates of Stornoway Airport. Across the islands, statues and stones mark the courage and commitment shown by generations of service members.

Lewis has always been a place of strength, whether in remembrance or in the continued care for its veterans today. It's a place where the past and present intertwine, where the sacrifices of yesterday inform the support networks of today, and where no one is left behind.



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A thriving green space for all



Laura Mulcahy, Senior Garden and Wellbeing Co-ordinator with Alliance partner Cyrenians cannot wait to meet you at the wonderful walled garden.



Linburn Walled Garden has enjoyed the start of the Scottish summer with its sunshine, heat and now the inevitable splash of rain. Inside the polytunnel, the grapevine is growing baby grapes, the tomatoes started to flower and tiny seeds turned into seedlings fast, eager to make it out into the big garden.

Just like seedlings adapt and thrive under the right conditions, so to do the veterans and families that come visit the garden. Open to the public weekdays, 9am-4pm, you can let off steam with a game of axe throwing and archery, relax in the calm surroundings with a cup of tea or get your hands dirty with the many garden activities on offer.

Thursday is our dedicated veteran / military family drop-in session day aptly named 'Hope Never Leaves'.

From 10am you can enjoy the outdoors with like minded others, building friendships and learning new skills. The last Thursday of every month is aimed at females only. Transport is not an issue with help from Vector 24 - just book directly.

Come be tempted by the unusual mints and herbs in the sensory garden, get a little lost in the wildflower maze and dare to dream of new culinary delights in our new kitchen garden. There is space for everyone to relax and unwind.

Why not come to the garden and look for yourself at our **Summer Open Day on Thursday 19 June from 10.00am to 2.00pm.**

There will be stalls from our Alliance partners showing the work they do and it's a chance to meet some old faces as well as new. Refreshments will be provided.

For more information or queries please contact Laura at lauramulcahy@cyrenians.scot

Help with Alert Study

As you may be aware the Centre for Military Education, Research and Public Engagement at Edinburgh Napier was funded by the Armed Forces Community Covenant to undertake a project focused on suicide prevention.

We are in the process of data gathering and part of that focuses on what agencies and services are doing to support veterans who may be at risk of suicide and how staff are supported to have and hear what can be distressing and difficult conversations.

We have constructed this short survey and would be extremely grateful if you could cascade within and across your organisation and invite colleagues to complete it. We very much want to hear from people who are working with veterans on a day-to-day basis as well as those in operational, clinical and strategic management roles.

The closing date for surveys to be completed is Friday 13 June.

On **19 June** we will host a workshop to review with colleagues the data collated from the survey and our literature review. All survey responders are invited to take part in the workshop which will be in person at Edinburgh Napier University.

You can access the survey by clicking here:
<https://forms.office.com/e/f6mYgN76Kn>

New Frontiers schedule

Issue No	Content Required by	Publication Date
1.	30 May 2025	3 June 2025
2.	18 July 2025	28 July 2025
3.	18 September 2025	28 September 2025
4.	18 November 2025	28 November 2025
5.	18 January 2026	28 January 2026
6.	18 March 2026	28 March 2026