

# Veterans Newsletter NI



Issue #1

September 2024



## Welcome Back to the Veteran's Newsletter NI

The Red Arrows perform for Armed Forces Day (Northern Ireland) over Belfast Lough - 22 June 2024

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#### Armed Forces Day 2024

Armed Forces Day - Northern Ireland. A recap of the day's inspiring events and activities

#### D-Day 80 years remembered

Honouring the legacy of D-Day: Northern Ireland commemorates 80 years of courage and sacrifice with special events and tributes

#### VPPP2 - Veteran Consultations

Be involved in the next round of Veterans Places, Pathways & People Funding Program.

#### Basra to Helmand

Iraq & Afghanistan veterans come together for an evening of connection.

#### NI Veterans Housing Survey, News, Updates & More.

We are delighted to bring you the latest edition of the Veteran's Newsletter - Northern Ireland, proudly presented by the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioners Office. Our mission is to keep you informed, connected, and inspired by the vibrant and diverse community of veterans across Northern Ireland.

In this edition, you can look forward to a variety of content designed to uplift and inform. We will share good news stories that highlight the incredible achievements and contributions of veterans within our community. From personal success stories to community initiatives, our aim is to showcase the very best of what our veterans have to offer.

Beyond the stories of success, we will keep you updated on upcoming events, opportunities, and relevant news that impacts our community. Whether it's information on support services, upcoming gatherings, or new programmes, our goal is to ensure you have all the resources you need at your fingertips.

This newsletter is as much yours as it is ours. If you have a story, event, or update you'd like to share with the wider community, we encourage you to reach out. Please feel free to email us at [commissioner@nivco.co.uk](mailto:commissioner@nivco.co.uk) with your contributions.

Thank you for being a part of this journey with us. Together, we can continue to build a strong, supportive, and thriving veterans' community in Northern Ireland.

Warm regards,  
The Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office

# NI Veterans Commissioner's Office Update: A Year of Change and Commitment

As we step into the latter stages of 2024, the landscape for veterans across the UK is undergoing significant transformation. With changes in government and strategic realignments, the representation of veterans' issues and concerns is evolving, leading to a more streamlined approach to support and advocacy.

## **Resignation of Former Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner Danny Kinahan**

Earlier this month, Danny Kinahan stepped down from his role as Northern Ireland's first Veterans Commissioner. During his four years in office, Danny made substantial contributions to the veterans community, and we extend our heartfelt thanks for his dedication, engagement, and outreach efforts. The process for appointing his successor is already underway, and we hope to announce a new Veterans Commissioner soon. Updates regarding this appointment will be shared through the NI Veterans Commissioner's Office social media channels as more information becomes available.

## **Government Restructuring and Its Implications**

The recent change in government has resulted in the dissolution of the dedicated Minister for Veterans Affairs within the Cabinet Office. The Office for Veterans Affairs, previously established by the former administration, will now operate under the Ministry of Defence, led by Minister for Veterans & People, Alastair Carns MP. While this shift may change the representation of veterans at the government level, it is important to note that the Office for Veterans Affairs remains committed to delivering effective policies and strategies that recognise the invaluable contributions of our veterans to society.

In a significant development for Northern Ireland, a new Office for Veterans Affairs (Northern Ireland) post will be established in Belfast by early autumn. This position will be directly linked to the Office for Veterans Affairs in London, aiming to champion and integrate UK-wide policies for veterans residing in Northern Ireland. This initiative recognises the unique needs arising from our devolved administration and seeks to provide the best outcomes for NI veterans.

## **Support Services for Veterans**

The Veterans Welfare Service for Northern Ireland continues to work closely with the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Team. Together, they ensure that veterans seeking advice, welfare, or assistance have access to local caseworkers who can provide tailored support. This partnership extends to collaborative efforts with service charities, ensuring that veterans in need are connected with the appropriate resources and support networks.

## **Upcoming Events**

The Veterans Places, Pathways and People Programme is a significant funding initiative aimed at providing sustainable services and connections for veterans in Northern Ireland. A series of consultations are being held throughout the province, organised and facilitated by the Brooke House Health & Wellbeing Centre, with support from local Council Veterans Champions. The Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office is backing these events, and staff look forward to engaging with as many veterans as possible.

As we approach another period of remembrance, the NI Veterans Commissioner's Office will be actively involved in commemorative activities, providing support and representation for veterans. Additionally, the NIVCO-sponsored Op Banner Exhibition will be available for viewings, with further details to be announced soon. Stay updated on these events through our social media channels on Facebook and Twitter.

## **A Commitment to All Veterans**

The Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office is dedicated to serving all veterans, regardless of their background or the conflicts they have served in. If you have any veteran-related inquiries or require assistance, please do not hesitate to reach out.

You can contact the Commissioner's Office via email at [commissioner@nivco.co.uk](mailto:commissioner@nivco.co.uk) or by calling 028 2548 3169. Together, we can ensure that every veteran in Northern Ireland receives the recognition, support, and care they deserve.

# Veterans Places, Pathways & People Programme Consultations Begin

Veterans in Northern Ireland are set to benefit from a groundbreaking new phase of the Veterans, Places, Pathways, and People (VPPP) programme. Backed by the Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund, the VPPP programme is dedicated to creating lasting, sustainable support for veterans and their families as they build stronger futures.

The original VPPP programme, which ran from 2021 to 2023, focused on delivering direct support to veterans facing mental health challenges. The new phase, running from 2024 to 2027, will take that work even further, with a stronger emphasis on strategic development. This ensures the programme's impact will endure long after the funding period ends.

At its core, the VPPP programme aims to enhance veterans' physical and mental health through an evolving nationwide network of services. By promoting closer collaboration between military charities, health providers, and community organisations, the programme ensures veterans can access a seamless pathway of support. This includes not only access to essential health services but also opportunities to engage in therapeutic activities such as sporting, artistic, and horticultural endeavours, all of which foster personal connection and improve overall wellbeing.



**VPPP 2**  
Veterans Place, Pathways & People  
**Veteran Consultation Phase**

**Dates & Locations**

- 16 Sep 24 - 1000-1300 hrs, **Omagh** - Silver Birches Hotel
- 23 Sep 24 - 1900-2200 hrs, **Cookstown** - Royal Hotel
- 27 Sep 24 - 1000-1300 hrs, **Lisburn** - Lagan Valley
- 30 Sep 24 - 1000-1300 hrs, **Enniskillen** - Killyhevlin Hotel
- 5 Oct 24 - 1000-1300 hrs, **Ballymena** - Services Club
- 7 Oct 24 - 1900-2200 hrs, **Carrickfergus** - Town Hall
- 8 Oct 24 - 1000-1300 hrs, **Lurgan** - Brownlow House
- 8 Oct 24 - 1900-2200 hrs, **Antrim** - Antrim Civic Centre
- 11 Oct 24 - 1000-1300 hrs, **Kilkeel** - Kilmoney Arms Hotel
- 14 Oct 24 - 1000-1300 hrs, **Coleraine** - The Lodge Hotel
- 14 Oct 24 - 1900-2200 hrs, **L'Derry** - Whitehorse Hotel
- 17 Oct 24 - 1900-2200 hrs, **Bangor** - Royal British Legion
- 18 Oct 24 - 1000-1300 hrs, **Belfast** - TBC
- 21 Oct 24 - 1000-1200, hrs **Online** via Ms Teams

All consultation's are being supported by your local Council Veteran Champions and facilitated by Brooke House Health & Wellbeing Centre

For more information or to register for a consultation event please  
Email: [info@brookehouse.co.uk](mailto:info@brookehouse.co.uk)  
Tel: 028 8953 1223

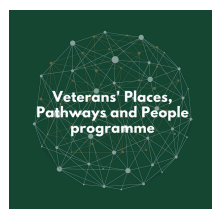
**BROOKE HOUSE**  
HEALTH & WELLBEING CENTRE

**THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT FUND TRUST**

Veterans' Places, Pathways and People programme

For veterans and their families, the programme offers a welcoming space to find the support they need to thrive. Whether it's mental health services, community-building activities, or simply a place to connect, the VPPP programme opens doors and offers a helping hand.

But the benefits extend beyond individual veterans. Organisations involved in the programme will work together to build sustainable support networks that focus on long-term impact and community integration. This collaborative approach ensures that the programme's legacy will endure, creating a self-sustaining ecosystem of support for veterans and their families across Northern Ireland.



To learn more about upcoming VPPP consultations and how you can get involved, contact Brooke House via email at [info@brookehouse.co.uk](mailto:info@brookehouse.co.uk) or by phone at **028 8953 1223**.

Northern Ireland's veterans have served the country with pride, and the VPPP programme is ensuring they receive the lasting support they deserve as they navigate life beyond the military. With this new phase of funding, veterans and their families can look forward to a brighter, stronger future.



# Armed Forces Day - Northern Ireland: A Celebration of Service & Community



Soldiers from the Irish Guards form up on parade for Armed Forces Day - Northern Ireland 2024



A gun salute from the 206 Battery Royal Artillery (Reserves) marks Armed Forces Day - Northern Ireland 2024



The Victory Rollers who performed at this year's Armed Forces Day 2024 at Loughshore Park, Jordanstown.

On Saturday, 22 June 2024, Loughshore Park in Jordanstown, Newtownabbey, played host to this year's Armed Forces Day, supported Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council. The event was a resounding success, bringing together communities to better understand and support our Armed Forces.

One of the many highlights of the day was the spectacular performance by the Red Arrows, who delivered their only show of the year over Belfast Lough, showcasing their incredible talent and precision flying. The excitement continued with musical displays, including a Beating Retreat by the Pipes and Drums & the Band of The Royal Irish as well as the Band of the Royal Marines. The Victory Rollers also entertained the crowd with beloved wartime hits, adding to the festive atmosphere.

Attendees had the opportunity to engage with the Armed Forces through interactive displays that featured impressive equipment and personnel both historic and modern. A gun salute from the 206 Battery Royal Artillery (Reserves) marked the occasion, while Explosive Ordnance Disposal robots and a variety of armoured vehicles, from tanks to transporters, were on display for all to see, touch and experience.

The event also highlighted the strong support from the Armed Forces community, with participation from both cadet and veteran organisations. Armed Forces Day aims to foster awareness and connection between the Armed Forces and the public, making it a free, family-friendly event filled with interaction and celebration.



Alan Murphy & Rachael Harger of the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office, at Armed Forces Day 2024, Loughshore Park, Newtownabbey.

# Mobile Exhibition Launched to Honour Soldiers of Operation Banner

The NI Veterans Commissioner's Office has commissioned a mobile exhibition to honour and tell the story of soldiers' experiences during Operation Banner, commonly known as the Troubles. The exhibition officially opened at Brownlow House in May 2024 and is set to tour Northern Ireland, serving as an informative and educational tribute to the sacrifices made by military families and a homage to our shared history.



One of the 14 Story panels of the Op Banner Exhibition  
- Launched 16 May 2024 at Brownlow House, Lurgan



NI Veterans Commissioner, Danny Kinahan, alongside Troubles widow Mrs Hilda Vennard, at the Op Banner Exhibition Launch 16 May 2024

The exhibition features a series of informative panels that provide an overview of Operation Banner, alongside regimental and police uniforms, personal kit, and deactivated and replica weapons used by members of the Armed Forces and security personnel during this tumultuous period.

In his opening remarks, Veterans Commissioner Danny Kinahan emphasised the importance of remembering the contributions and sacrifices of service personnel. He stated:

*"As part of my office's remit, I am keen not only to remember the great contribution, and indeed sacrifice, that many service personnel made during Operation Banner, but to also educate our community and bring to life the experiences of the men and women of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and others, including the members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and Northern Ireland Prison Service."*

The exhibition aims to travel across Northern Ireland, and veterans' groups, associations, or community organisation's interested in hosting it can contact the Commissioner's office via email at [commissioner@nivco.co.uk](mailto:commissioner@nivco.co.uk) for more information.

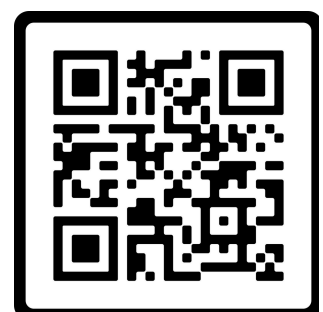
## Introducing the Veterans News Hub NI: Your Source for Veteran Information

The Veterans News Hub NI is a newly launched Facebook page dedicated to providing the latest news, events, and opportunities for veterans in Northern Ireland. Coordinated and managed by the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office, the page aims to deliver up-to-date, impartial, and relevant information as it happens.

By following our page, you can stay informed about important events and resources available to veterans in the region. To join our community and receive the most current updates, simply scan the QR code provided.

We believe that together we can make accessing information easier for veterans and their families. If you have news or events to share, we encourage you to reach out via email at [commissioner@nivco.co.uk](mailto:commissioner@nivco.co.uk). Join us in staying connected and informed!

Veterans News  
Hub NI



# Regenerate Veterans Group Hosts Second Annual Sandcastle Challenge

On 22 June 2024, the Regenerate Veterans Group took to the stunning north coast for their second annual Sandcastle Challenge, and what a day it was! With four enthusiastic teams ready to unleash their creativity, the event was filled with laughter, camaraderie, and a whole lot of fun!

The beautiful East Strand beach in Portrush was the perfect backdrop, with the sun shining down on our sandcastle architects. Thanks to C Coy 2 R IRISH for generously providing the shovels, our members got to work, planning and building their sandy masterpieces. The spectacle drew plenty of attention from fellow beachgoers and curious tourists, who couldn't resist stopping to admire the creativity on display!



Regenerate veterans members get stuck in for competitive sandcastle building - 22 June 24

To wrap up the day, we fired up the BBQ and enjoyed some delicious refreshments in Bushmills, sharing stories and laughter as we celebrated our accomplishments.

Exciting news for next year: we plan to open the challenge to other veterans groups! So, stay tuned for more details and get ready for even more fun in the sun!

A huge thank you to everyone who participated and supported the event. Here's to building more memories together!

Warm regards,  
Regenerate Veterans Group

Local lifeguards stepped up to the plate as judges, and after much deliberation, the team "Guns of Navarone" emerged victorious! Their impressive sandcastle design truly wowed the crowd and earned them the top spot.

The Sandcastle Challenge wasn't just about building; it was a fantastic opportunity for our members to collaborate, develop plans, and work as a team, fostering a sense of achievement and pride in their creations.



A collective group photo of the Regenerate Veterans Group Sand Castle Builders - 22 June 24



Team 'Guns of Navarone' emerge victorious as the winners of this year's Regenerate Veterans Group, Sand Castle Building Competition 2024

# Join the Reading Force Book Club: Connect, Read, and Enjoy



Have you ever considered joining a book club? Look no further! Reading Force book clubs are tri-service, welcoming serving personnel, spouses/partners, veterans, reservists, and their families. Whether you're a seasoned bookworm or a first-time member, everyone is welcome to join the fun! Our book clubs provide a fantastic opportunity to meet new people within the military and veteran community, fostering connections and reducing feelings of isolation.

*"I'm a few chapters into the next book now.  
Looking forward to chatting at the next meet!"*

- A member of our online book club.

Our children's book clubs have been an instant hit, and we launched our adult online book clubs in March 2021. These clubs have successfully connected military and veteran communities around the globe, and their popularity continues to soar! We offer a mix of online and in-person meetings, with many groups choosing to keep the momentum going beyond the three free books provided by Reading Force.



*- Another delighted member of our online book club.*

*"Mine came today too. Fab.  
Such happy post!"*

- Another delighted member of our online book club.

If you're interested in joining a Reading Force Book Club or have any questions, get in touch with Nicola at [nicola@readingforce.org.uk](mailto:nicola@readingforce.org.uk) or call 07519 665410.

\*Please note that volunteer coordinators of our children's book clubs must hold a recent Enhanced Access NI.

For more information and to explore the amazing titles we offer, please check out: [www.readingforce.org.uk/book-club-suggested-titles](http://www.readingforce.org.uk/book-club-suggested-titles) or scan the QR code below.



Stay connected and keep up to date with the latest news from Reading Force! Find us on Facebook, Instagram, and X.



*Happy Reading!*

# NI Commemorates the 80th Anniversary of D-Day: A Tribute to Valour and Sacrifice

This year marks a significant milestone as we commemorate the 80th anniversary of D-Day, the operation that altered the course of World War II and paved the way for an Allied victory. As we reflect on this occasion, we recognise that the number of veterans from this historic event is dwindling, with many now reaching or surpassing their centenary years. Their bravery and sacrifice remain etched in our collective memory, reminding us of the high cost of freedom.

D-Day, which took place on June 6, 1944, was a monumental undertaking involving meticulous planning and coordination across land, air, and sea. Northern Ireland played a crucial role in this operation, serving as a vital staging ground for Allied forces. Many American troops were stationed in Belfast, Bangor, and surrounding areas, preparing for Operation Overlord—the code name for the D-Day invasion. General Eisenhower himself visited Bangor to inspect his troops, highlighting the importance of this region and its people in the wartime effort.

Lough Erne and Enniskillen were instrumental in providing logistical support, aircraft and provision of reconnaissance and aerial assistance. These forces were essential for the success of the naval crossings from the United States and Canada to the United Kingdom, a perilous journey fraught with danger as German U-boats lay in wait to disrupt supply lines. The port of Londonderry also played a significant role as the first home port for many ships after their treacherous Atlantic crossing, with numerous World War II shipwrecks still lying off the coast of Donegal, serving as solemn reminders of the dangers faced during this time.



NI Walking With the Wounded Veterans scale Slieve Donard mountain in the Mourne to light a commemorative beacon for D-DAY 80 on 6 June 2024

In honour of the sacrifices made during this critical period, Northern Ireland has held a series of poignant commemoration events, including talks, concerts, dawn services, and remembrance ceremonies. These events pay tribute to the brave men and women who fought for our freedoms. Notably, the Royal Ulster Rifles (RUR) was the only British regiment to have its full strength of two battalions deployed on D-Day, showcasing the fighting spirit of men from Northern Ireland. Anecdotes shared during these events remind us of the few veterans who remain, as well as the countless others who have passed but whose legacies continue to inspire.

As we gather to remember, we reflect on the profound impact D-Day had on the world. It was a day when courage and determination triumphed over tyranny, allowing us to enjoy the freedoms we cherish today. For our present, they gave their tomorrow.

As we observe this 80th anniversary, let us honour the memory of those who served and ensure their stories are never forgotten. Their bravery is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and a reminder of the importance of standing together in adversity. In the words of one veteran, "We did what we had to do, and we did it for those who would come after us." Let us carry that spirit forward as we continue to celebrate and protect the freedoms they fought so valiantly to secure.



**Above:** Standard bearers, veterans, dignitaries and the public come together in Portrush East strand beach to light a commemorative beacon for D-DAY 80 on 6 June 2024

**Right:** Royal British Legions members and dignitaries attend a dawn service to mark and commemorate the beginning of D-DAY at 0700 hrs on 6 June 2024 at Larne Chain Memorial Tower, Sandy Bay Beach.





# DMWS Veterans Health Seminar in Lisburn: Supporting Our Heroes

Recently, the DMWS (Defence Medical Welfare Service) hosted a Veterans Health Seminar in Lisburn, which proved to be an inspiring event for all attendees. The seminar focused on the incredible support DMWS provides to veterans who are awaiting or undergoing medical treatment for both mental and physical health conditions. Notably, the event was attended by NI Health Minister Mike Nesbitt MLA, who emphasised that "consistency is key" in effectively addressing the health needs of veterans in the Northern Ireland.

The discussions highlighted the importance of collaboration within the veteran sector, emphasising how vital DMWS's role is in supporting the health and wellbeing of our veterans. The insights shared during the seminar underscored the commitment to ensuring that veterans receive the care and support they need during challenging times.

## About DMWS Northern Ireland

DMWS offers independent and confidential welfare support for Armed Forces veterans and their families or carers in Northern Ireland. Their services include:

- A confidential and person-centred approach for veterans and their families.
- Emotional and practical support tailored to individual needs.
- Access to physical and mental health clinicians.
- Signposting and supported referrals to veteran-friendly agencies.

The service is built on considerable experience operating in Northern Ireland and is strengthened through collaboration with key partners. This ensures that DMWS operates with respect to and in line with the political and security context of the region. Key collaborations include:

- The NI Veterans Commissioner's Office
- The Veterans Welfare Service NI (VWS NI)

## Ensuring Comprehensive Support for Veterans

DMWS is dedicated to ensuring that veterans receive the consultations they need with clinicians, providing support and guidance to manage both acute and chronic conditions. They link veterans to appropriate specialist services as they become available and advocate for their needs when required.

The service also aims to provide an up-to-date, detailed account of the physical and/or mental health conditions veterans are experiencing, which reduces the need for them to repeatedly share their stories. For serious cases, DMWS ensures that available resources are accessed as quickly as possible and offers ongoing support to help maintain good self-management with complex clinical conditions. This approach allows veterans to "wait well" while awaiting onward referrals or treatment.



Pictured (L-R) Alan Murphy (Office Lead NIVCO), Andi Cole (Complex Case Manager, DMWS), Bob Reid (Programme Lead, DMWS) and Karen Hutchinson (Welfare Manager, VWS NI)

## Important Notes on Service Limitations

It is important to note that DMWS does not provide second opinions, prescribe drug treatments, or deal with issues requiring emergency responses.

## How to Get Support

Veterans seeking support can easily reach out to DMWS by emailing [referralsNI@dmws.org.uk](mailto:referralsNI@dmws.org.uk).

Self-referrals are welcome, and for those in crisis or needing out-of-hours support, it is crucial to call 999 or the Samaritans at 116 123.

In conclusion, the DMWS Veterans Health Seminar in Lisburn was a testament to the dedication and commitment of DMWS in supporting the health and wellbeing of veterans. Their collaborative approach and comprehensive services ensure that our heroes receive the care they deserve, helping them navigate the challenges they face with dignity and respect.

# Celebrating Our Heroes:

## The Northern Ireland Veterans Awards

Three years ago, a remarkable vision was born from the heart of a dedicated veteran, Jason Gillard. His mission? To recognise, acknowledge, and promote the invaluable contributions of veterans to Northern Ireland society through the Northern Ireland Veterans Awards. With an unwavering spirit and infectious enthusiasm, Jason sought to shine a light on the many veterans who work tirelessly behind the scenes, making a positive impact in their communities.

Inspired by the success of similar awards in England, Scotland, and Wales, Jason aimed to change the narrative surrounding veterans in Northern Ireland. He wanted to highlight their positive attributes and contributions, moving away from the often painful historical portrayals that still resonate with many, both veterans and the public alike.

To bring his vision to life, Jason reached out to sponsors from all corners of Northern Ireland, gathering support to organise the inaugural Northern Ireland Veterans Awards. The first ceremony took place at the Stormont Hotel in October 2022, and it was a resounding success. Building on that momentum, the awards grew even bigger and better in 2023, moving to the prestigious Europa Hotel in Belfast.

Now, as we look forward to the third annual Northern Ireland Veterans Awards, Jason's vision continues to thrive. This year, the awards will be held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Belfast in October 2024. The event promises to be a celebration of the incredible achievements of veterans across the region.



NI Veterans Awards founder – Jason Gillard, RAF Veteran & Author – Liz McConaghy and NI Veterans Commissioner – Danny Kinahan, attend the 2nd NI Veterans Awards Oct 2023 at Europa Hotel, Belfast.



Legacy Resources were named Veteran Owned Business of the Year 2023

Nominations cover the following categories:

- Role Model of the Year
- Community Award
- Health & Wellbeing Award
- Recognition to NI's Fitness Industry
- Reservist of the Year
- Entrepreneur of the Year
- Canning Day Inspiration Award
- Employer of the Year
- Lifetime Achievement Award
- Business Leader Award
- Volunteer of the Year Award
- Veterans Group of the Year Award

Join us in celebrating the heroes among us and honouring their dedication to making Northern Ireland a better place for all. Together, let's continue to change the narrative and recognise the positive impact of our veterans!



Brian McKee- NI Veterans Awards recipient



For more information please visit [www.veteransawardsireland.com](http://www.veteransawardsireland.com)

# The Serving and Ex-Serving Women's Network (SESWN) in Northern Ireland

Since its launch in May 2023, the Serving and Ex-Serving Women's Network (SESWN) in Northern Ireland has blossomed into a vibrant community, providing a supportive space for women who have served in the Armed Forces. Over the past year, SESWN has become a regular social feature, bringing together serving and ex-serving women for enjoyable activities that foster connection and camaraderie.

Throughout the last twelve months, SESWN has organised a variety of events designed to unite this remarkable community. From Christmas wreath-making sessions to afternoon teas, brewery tours, and a recent gathering at a gun club for light-hearted target practice, the network has created opportunities for members to catch up and share experiences in a relaxed atmosphere.

A noteworthy aspect of the gun club event was the diverse experiences of participants. Some current members are accustomed to handling weapons, while more senior members, who were not permitted to carry arms during their service, found the day to be a novel experience.

At the heart of SESWN is the empowering concept of women supporting women. Members come from various backgrounds within the Armed Forces, each with unique stories. Many have shared tales of navigating career breaks due to pregnancies or balancing family life with military service. This shared history fosters a strong bond among members, creating an environment where women can openly discuss their challenges and triumphs.

The atmosphere at SESWN events is characterised by warmth, laughter, and mutual respect. The generational differences among members enrich conversations, allowing for inspiring exchanges about progress made for women in the military and the challenges that remain. This upbeat group is dedicated to connecting, networking, and uplifting one another, making it a truly special community.

The success of SESWN has not gone unnoticed. The network was awarded a Veterans Foundation Grant, which will help cover the costs of future activities, ensuring that the group can continue to thrive and offer engaging events for its members.

If you are a serving or ex-serving woman looking for a fun-loving, supportive, and inspirational group, the Serving and Ex-Serving Women's Network welcomes you with open arms. Join a community that celebrates your service and fosters lasting friendships.



For more information, please email: [hello@seswn.co.uk](mailto:hello@seswn.co.uk)  
or register via our website at [www.seswn.co.uk](http://www.seswn.co.uk).



SESWN Founder Jen Robinson alongside Shaun Huggins - Former Tower of London Yeoman Warder who presented to the SESWN in May 2024.



Both serving and ex serving ladies enjoying a catch up at a SESWN afternoon tea event.



A SESWN member enjoying the Christmas wreath making event in December 2023.

# From Basra to Helmand: Honouring Our Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans

On Thursday, September 19, the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office proudly welcomed over 100 veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns to Parliament Buildings, Stormont. This special event was organised to foster networking, recognise service, and strengthen connections among those who have served in these significant military operations.

The day was marked by beautiful weather, which set the perfect backdrop for a memorable gathering. Attendees were treated to a captivating performance by the Frontier Pipes and Drums in the Great Hall, creating an uplifting atmosphere that resonated with pride and camaraderie. Following the performance, veterans embarked on a tour of the historic Stormont building, which highlighted its significant military history, particularly its role during World War II when the Senate Room served as an operations room for RAF Command.

The event provided a wonderful opportunity for veterans to wear their medals with pride, catch up with old friends, and spend an evening with like-minded individuals who share similar experiences and backgrounds.

Guest speaker Mike Murdoch delivered a candid talk about military life, skilfully blending humour with insights drawn from his own experiences. His discussion touched on the discipline and training traits that define veterans, making it both relatable and inspiring. We were fortunate to have Mike share his time and expertise, which helped make this occasion truly memorable for all in attendance.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to all the veterans who attended, including our guest speaker Mike Murdoch, Lord Elliott, who sponsored this event, the Frontier Pipes and Drums, and the dedicated staff who worked tirelessly to make the evening possible. This event not only celebrated the service of our veterans but also reinforced the importance of community and support among those who have served. Together, we continue to honour their sacrifices and contributions to our nation.



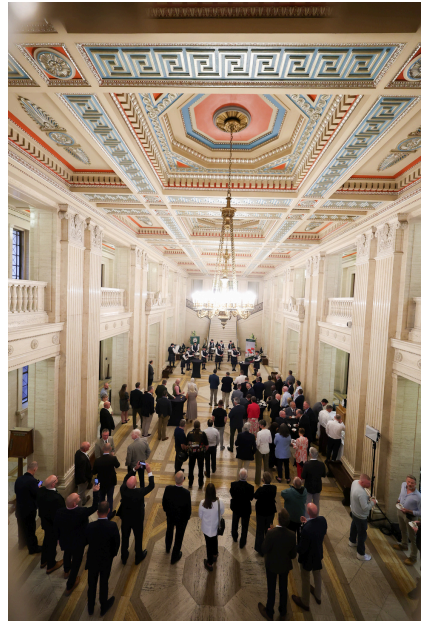
NI Veterans gather on the steps in the Great Hall of Parliament Buildings, Stormont, at the 'From Basra to Helmand' event, 2024.



Veterans catch up with each other outside Parliament Buildings, Stormont before enjoying an evening of entertainment, culture and connection.



Veterans catch up with each other outside Parliament Buildings,



The Frontier Pipes & Drums perform for guests attending the 'From Basra to Helmand' veterans event held at Parliament Buildings, Stormont.



The Frontier Pipes & Drums perform in the Great Hall Parliament Buildings, Stormont.



Lord Elliott (Event Sponsor), Alan Murphy & Rachael Harger (Event Organisers - NIVCO) and Mike Murdoch (Guest Speaker), outside Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

# Road MAP to Recovery: Supporting Veterans Across Northern Ireland

The Road MAP to Recovery (RMTR) program is a veteran-led initiative dedicated to providing essential peer support for veterans throughout Northern Ireland. This programme offers a safe and confidential environment where veterans can come together to address various challenges, including relationship issues, feelings of anger, loneliness, addiction, and trauma.

With multiple support groups established across the region, RMTR also extends its services to veterans' families and carers, ensuring that the support network encompasses all those affected by military service. Michael Donaldson, a key contact for the programme, encourages anyone in need of support to reach out. He can be contacted at 074 2207 4363 or via email at [m.donaldson@inspirewellbeing.org](mailto:m.donaldson@inspirewellbeing.org).

Feedback from RMTR participants highlights the profound impact of the program. One veteran shared,

*"The Road MAP to Recovery program has had a big impact in showing me there is a way we as veterans can take some control in the way we help and support each other as well as showing me I am able to help others."*

Another participant expressed gratitude for the non-judgmental atmosphere, stating,

*"It gave me support to be able to speak about my problems and not be judged; it gave me hope."*



**Call: 074 2207 4363**  
**or Email: [m.donaldson@inspirewellbeing.org](mailto:m.donaldson@inspirewellbeing.org)**  
for further information about Road MAP to Recovery groups local to you.

# Complete the Survey!

## Help Us Understand the Housing Situation for Veterans in Northern Ireland

As the veterans question was not included in the Northern Ireland 2021 census, there is a significant lack of data concerning veterans living in Northern Ireland, particularly regarding health, housing, and employment. To address this gap, a survey has been commissioned to help capture a snapshot of veterans' housing situations in Northern Ireland.

We need your voice to help us understand the overall housing situation for veterans. **This survey is not just for those facing homelessness or housing issues; it is inclusive of all veterans living in Northern Ireland.** Your experiences matter, and they will contribute to a clearer understanding of the challenges and needs within our veteran community.

A promotional poster for the 'NI Veterans Housing & Homelessness Needs Survey'. The poster features a hand holding a cardboard house cutout on the left. The title 'NI Veterans Housing & Homelessness Needs Survey' is prominently displayed in white text on a dark grey background. Below the title, it says 'Help us better understand housing and homelessness issues impacting veterans in Northern Ireland'. A large QR code is centered on the right side. At the bottom right, it indicates the survey period: 'September - October 2024'. In the bottom left corner, there is a logo for the Tanvally & Anaghline Project (TAP) featuring three stylized figures and the letters T, A, P in colored boxes.

**NI Veterans Housing & Homelessness Needs Survey**

Help us better understand housing and homelessness issues impacting veterans in Northern Ireland



September - October 2024

T A P  
Tanvally & Anaghline Project

We are supporting a survey by the Tanvally & Anaghline Project (TAP) to identify key housing and homelessness issues affecting veterans across Northern Ireland. To allow an appropriate analysis, TAP are aiming for 300 respondents and appreciate your willingness to complete this 5-10 minute survey.

**You can take part in the survey visit: [www.surveymonkey.com/r/NJBRT7Z](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NJBRT7Z) or scan the QR code provided.**

The survey will remain open until October, and all responses are anonymous. Your feedback is crucial in gathering evidence about the housing landscape for veterans. Rest assured, all comments will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, as TAP values open, honest, and constructive feedback.

We invite ALL veterans, their dependents, and carers to share their views. Please spread the word within your community to ensure we reach as many voices as possible.

Thank you for taking the time to contribute to this important initiative! Your input will help shape the future of housing support for veterans in Northern Ireland.

# The Homeless Warrior Project: Supporting Veterans in Belfast

The Homeless Warrior Project is a vital initiative spearheaded by Andy Allen Veteran Support Services and led by Dennis Currie. This programme is dedicated to identifying veterans who are living on the streets of Belfast and connecting them with essential welfare support. In addition to providing crucial assistance, the project also distributes basic care packages to those experiencing homelessness.

Beyond its focus on veterans, the Homeless Warrior Project extends its support to non-veterans as well, aiming to reshape the narrative surrounding what it means to be a veteran or a person who has served in the Armed Forces in Northern Ireland. By fostering understanding and compassion, the initiative works to break down stereotypes and promote a more inclusive community.

Every Thursday evening, Dennis Currie and a dedicated team of volunteers come together to provide frontline help to those in need. Their commitment and compassion make a significant difference in the lives of many individuals facing homelessness.

If you would like to learn more about the Homeless Warrior Project or find out how you can contribute to this important cause, please reach out to Dennis by email at: [dennis@aavsni.com](mailto:dennis@aavsni.com). Your support can help change lives and provide hope to those who have served our country.



AAVS NI Homeless Warrior Volunteers on hand to identify & help veteran homelessness in Belfast city centre, and assist those experiencing homelessness.

## Connecting Veterans to Support Veterans Advice line for Statutory Professionals:

Mark Ewing of the Veterans Advice line for Statutory Professionals (VASP) has been actively traveling across Northern Ireland, conducting information clinics at local libraries. This initiative aims to create a safe and direct connection for veterans who have questions about the support and assistance available to them.

The information clinics serve as a valuable resource, allowing veterans and their families to engage with Mark and gain insights into the various support services tailored to their needs. Whether it's navigating benefits, accessing healthcare, or finding community resources, these clinics are designed to empower veterans with the knowledge they need to access the help available to them.

If you are a veteran or a family member interested in learning more about veteran support services, consider attending one of Mark's information clinics. For further information, you can also reach out directly by **calling 07551 397384 or emailing [VASP@sommenursing.org](mailto:VASP@sommenursing.org)**. Your journey to support starts here, and Mark is ready to assist you in finding the resources you need.



Laura Watson (Reading Force), Mark Ewing (VASP) & Rachael Harger (NIVCO) support a VASP veterans drop in information clinic at Carrickfergus Library - June 2024

# 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.aavsnri.com](http://www.aavsnri.com)**  
**Tel: 02890 747071**

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

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**

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

Veterans Advice-line for  
Statutory Professionals  
**E: [vasp@sommenursing.org](mailto:vasp@sommenursing.org)**  
**Tel: 07551 397384**

## Veteran Health & Wellbeing

Beyond the Battlefield  
**[www.beyondthebattlefield.org](http://www.beyondthebattlefield.org)**  
**Tel: 02891 228389**

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**

Serving & Ex Serving Women's  
Network (SESWN)  
**E: [Hello@seswn.co.uk](mailto>Hello@seswn.co.uk)**  
**Tel: 07740 580123**

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**