

Forces jobs fair hailed a huge success



Gary Shivers
and Ian Barber

Around 100 veterans visited the Preston campus of the University of Central Lancashire, UCLan, when an event to match up former members of the Armed Forces with new employment opportunities was held.

For many of the ex-forces personnel, finding work in 'civvy street' can feel daunting after military life, and so the University, Job Centre Plus, the Department for Work and Pensions, DWP, and local councils all worked to bring around 27 employers and employer support organisations to the event.

While some veterans have physical injuries sustained while serving their country, others may be dealing with unseen challenges. Recent research by the Poppy Factory has shown that four out of the five ex-Forces personnel they work with report

a mental health condition.

Gary Shivers, DWP's Armed Forces Champion for Cumbria and Lancashire, who organised the jobs fair, said: "This event was designed to support everyone – from those people with complex health issues to those who are job-ready – and is a major stepping-stone in showcasing the opportunities that are available to this community. I was overwhelmed at the response from national employers and partners who showed how the Armed Forces Covenant can work in practice."

Ian Barber, Project Lead of the Lancashire Armed Forces Covenant Hub, based at UCLan, said: "This is another important event in support of Lancashire's Armed Forces community under the banner of the Armed Forces Covenant. It will directly improve the lives of Forces people and

shows great collaboration between government bodies such as DWP with private companies and charities alike – all held within UCLan's wonderful Student Centre building."

Nigel Edwards, a former Royal Air Force pilot, attended the event with his wife Alison, who has also previously served in the RAF. Nigel said he found the event engaging and felt like there was a lot on offer: "Many veterans are highly skilled people who can't get a job because they don't know how to go about it. So, this (event) is really good, and I hope we will see more of them in the future."

The event was the first of its kind in Lancashire, but it is hoped the format will be rolled out across other regions.



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YOUR COVENANT AT WORK

INTERNATIONAL FILM PREMIER

A documentary film about a veterans' charity was selected from 7,000 entries to be screened at an international short film festival in Germany.

'Return. Belong. Prosper.' is the result of a two-year collaboration between Veterans In Communities, based in Haslingden, researchers from Anglia Ruskin University and filmmakers. They worked with veterans to capture their stories to highlight how creativity helped them transition from military to civilian life.

It is part of a much larger Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project entitled Stories in Transition and also involved University of the Arts London and Manchester Metropolitan and Exeter Universities which created three films.

All three films were shown in a Bristol arthouse cinema in front of all the participants and, following each screening, a round table discussion was held.

VIC Operations Manager Bob Elliott said: "While our film was being shown I heard someone say, 'Wow' and then when we went back into the room to discuss it someone else also said, 'Wow'. It must have had quite an impact on them."

All three 30-minute films will be premiered on June 29 at the National Army Museum in London, when invited guests will be from the MOD, Government, funders and others who are able to make decisions and change the way veterans can be supported during their transitioning process.



LEADING FROM FRONT

Lancashire County Council Armed Forces Champion Alf Clempson joined the 'Great Tommy Sleepout' and spent a night outside Booths Supermarket in Poulton-le-Fylde.

The challenge raised more than £1,100 online and along with two friends who joined him on the sleep out – veterans Dave Whitworth and Peter le Marinel – collected nearly £1,400. The money will support UK military personnel who have no place to call home.

County Councillor Clempson spent the night in his army sleeping bag which he had not used in around 20 years and found he could no longer zip up, Dave was in a hammock, which he fell out of at 2am, while Peter had accidentally turned his sleeping bag inside out. Although little sleep was had, there was plenty of banter. County Councillor Clempson spent 24 years in the Scots Guards and is a founding patron of the Tommy Club, an arm of The Royal British Legion Industries.

RICK'S MANAGER ROLE

FORMER Positive Pathways Co-ordinator at Fleetwood Town Rick Clement has now taken on the new role of Community Trust Engagement Manager.

Veteran Rick, who served 14 years with the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment before he endured life changing injuries due to an IED in Afghanistan, has worked with Fleetwood for two years.



He said: "I was looking for a bigger challenge and when I saw this job come along I just thought I would go for it. I have more responsibility as I am now managing all of the projects, including the veterans. As a Platoon Sergeant, I am used to being in middle management and so I felt up for the challenge."

YOUR COVENANT AT WORK



OP FORTITUDE

A Government plan to end veteran homelessness in 2023 will fund more than 900 supported housing units and Burnley-based Healthier Heroes will be bidding to provide some of the services.

Op Fortitude is backed by £8.5million, including money which was used to support homeless veterans over Christmas 2022. The units which are across the country, will give specialist help for former armed forces personnel to meet health, education and employment needs.

Healthier Heroes has 21 units in its main base at Bancroft House and eight supported two and four-bedroom houses, owned by Calico, for veterans when they are ready to move on.

Managing Director Andy Powell said: "We will be applying as soon as the grant funding has been released and we will be hoping for a decision before the summer. If we get the grant, it will enable us to support veterans in a wider context and support them moving forward and having a long term strategy.

"We will target veterans' mental health and addiction issues and then be able to help them to gain employment. We are looking to expand what we do into central Lancashire and we are in discussion with housing providers and Preston City Council."

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Johnny Mercer said: "No one, not least those who have served this country, should be homeless. As a government, we remain steadfastly committed to ending veteran homelessness in 2023."

CUMBRIAN CHALLENGE

Two veterans from the Military Veterans' Service, MVS, and two clinicians from the Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust have signed up complete the Walking With The Wounded Cumbrian Challenge in May.



recently headed down to London to the Royal College of Psychiatry to host four co-production workshops relating to a women veterans' project."

The four will be taking on the 'tough route' which includes nine peaks, a total distance of 26km and an ascent of 1,732m and their route plunges up and down the hills to the west of Grasmere before sweeping down from the north along Gibson Knott into the finish line.

MVS Regional Services Lead Alie Salford said: "We have also

Research shows many women veterans do not access or remain engaged with mental health services leading to more severe and long-lasting issues. Objectives are: to increase referrals of women into North West veterans' services from 5% to 11% and increase the number who remain engaged; reduce the number who fail to attend and provide more women specific pathways within veterans' specialist services.

ANDY COOKE AWARD

The first recipient of an award in memory of a Custody Co-ordinator at Veterans HQ Liverpool was Chris Grace, from HMP Risley.



Chris, who is Veterans in Custody officer at the Warrington prison, was presented with the Andy Cooke award by the Lord Mayor of Liverpool City Council Councilor Roy Gladden. Andy served as a field gun crew member in the Royal Navy and died in February 2022.

Chris said: "I accepted the award for the team at Risley, that is myself, two Prison Officers and three members of Achieve staff. I wanted it to be for all of the staff because we all run the programme Discovery. Lots of the veterans become Peer Mentors and they mentor other prisoners and help them when they are six to nine months away from getting released."

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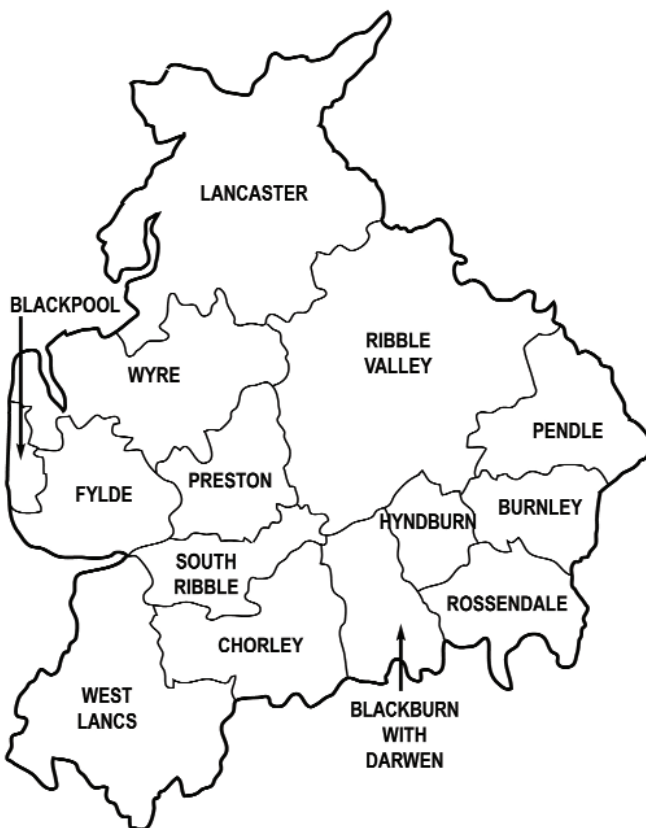
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SCANDINAVIAN TRIP TO BURNLEY

FRIENDSHIPS forged through football have been further embedded after a seven-day visit to Burnley.

Veterans from Norway and their counterparts from Burnley Football Club in the Community Veterans' Programme first met at an international football competition in Glasgow. Veterans Project Officer at

Burnley John Pluckwell said: "We were invited by Walking With The Wounded to represent England at the competition and afterwards we had many meetings with the Norwegians who initially wanted us to visit in June, but the war in the Ukraine changed plans."

John, and his counterpart in

Norway, Øivind Tangstad, known as Tank, then started discussing a Remembrance visit to Burnley as the two countries have very different commemorations.

John said: "We had 24 veterans come over aged from 24 to 52. As there is still conscription in Norway everyone is a veteran unless



they are in a protected profession." They stayed at Burnley FCitC's Whitehough Outdoor Activities Centre in Barley, Pendle and enjoyed a week full of activities.

COVENANT NEWS has been provided by The Lancashire Armed Forces Covenant Hub working in partnership with Lancashire County Council, the University of Central Lancashire, Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust and Regional Army Headquarters.



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