

As we release this edition of AFC News we recognise the difficult situation that the Coronavirus is placing the country in. Please try to stay safe and follow the government's guidelines on social distancing and self isolation. You can get more information at www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response. Naturally, the nations armed forces will have a role to play in assisting our emergency services, health professionals and our communities. If you need assistance please ask for it from your local community - stay safe.

Retreat aids veterans' mental health



MILITARY veterans have created a woodland retreat to improve the wellbeing of ex-service personnel backed by an Armed Forces Covenant grant.

While serving in the military, service personnel often find themselves in the natural environment, but unable to appreciate them due to the task at hand and a high state of readiness. At Belisama's Retreat, on the outskirts of Preston, nearly four acres of woodland is providing a safe haven to aid veterans' mental wellbeing by taking them back to

nature.

Paul Marriott (known as JP), 50, joined the Junior Leaders at 16 and spent 14 years in the Royal Artillery. Four years ago, the former artist invested his army pension in the picturesque woodland on the banks of the River Ribble and set up the Community Interest Company Belisama's Retreat. Together with fellow director Royal Signals veteran Steve Robinson, and a small army of volunteers, they have begun to manage the woodland by removing dead trees, coppicing sections and digging drainage trenches. In December 2019 they secured a grant of £70,000 from the Positive Pathways programme of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. Work has already started on access steps down the steep slope, a new decking area has been created and the lower part of the site now has an outdoor classroom created from a recycled military cargo parachute.

JP said: "This place works and I know that there are veterans who are alive today because this place has saved them. When you are in the services you don't get the

chance to experience the nature around you because you are there for a reason. Coming here takes veterans back but without the pressure and they can take their time to appreciate their surroundings. When they sit round the fire and talk and that's when they find they are not alone and the cloud begins to lift."

Project Lead for Lancashire Armed Forces Covenant Hub Ian Barber said: "CICs like Belisama's Retreat are doing great work with groups and individuals to improve their mental health and overall quality of life."



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YOUR COVENANT AT WORK



GPS SIGN FOR MILITARY DUTY

The Lancashire Armed Forces Covenant Hub has been working with The Royal British Legion and Veterans In Communities to deliver Armed Forces training to NHS primary care staff across Lancashire.

With support from the local Clinical Commissioning Groups, two-hour training sessions have been provided which help NHS staff to better understand the armed forces community, what their health needs are, and why they can sometime find it difficult to engage with health services. The sessions are specifically designed to support the Royal College of General Practitioners Veteran Friendly GP scheme, as practices across Lancashire seek to improve their understanding of the military community and become

accredited to the scheme.

Project Lead for the Hub Ian Barber said: "To date we have over 40 accredited practices in Lancashire and we're working hard to see this number increase over the coming months. Feedback from NHS staff shows that this training increases their confidence to support the military community and some veterans have already explained the difference it can make when someone shows them understanding and empathy."

Two of the main activities are recording the armed forces community on NHS data systems and, where appropriate, directing them to specialist services provided by the NHS or a range of service charities. Please make contact with ibarber@uclan.ac.uk to request a training session.



CHILDREN'S SERVICE

A Children's Remembrance Service is now held annually in Cleveleys, thanks to Wyre Armed Forces Champion Councillor Andrea Kay.

The town does not have a Cenotaph and children were previously attending a ceremony in Thornton but now they hold their own event each November. Cllr Kay worked with pupils to make thousands of poppies and asked a local firm to make a wooden silhouette 'Tommy' which is now a permanent fixture in the armed forces corner of Cleveleys Library. Veterans were invited and children led the service and read poems near the town's three memorial benches. The Friends of Cleveleys Library has now launched a weekly veterans' coffee morning.



GOVERNMENT STEPS UP TO PUT VETERANS FIRST

A commitment to put veterans' affairs at the heart of Government has been honoured with the creation of a new department.

The Office for Veterans' Affairs is headed

by the most senior officer injured in combat in Afghanistan, Retired Colonel David Richmond CBE, (pictured) who went on to become Director of Recovery at Help for Heroes. It has been tasked with improving veterans' services in

areas such as mental health, employment and housing and better co-ordinating the charity sector. The aim is to ensure world-class provision of life-long veterans' care services in the UK.

YOUR COVENANT AT WORK



CHARITY BROADENS IT'S HORIZONS

Step-Together Volunteering aims to motivate, inspire and enable society's most excluded to participate in community volunteering as a way of helping them to develop skills, confidence and the motivation to turn their lives around. This includes amongst others, service personnel who are Wounded Injured or Sick (WIS) and veteran groups.

Traditionally working with referrals from the Personnel Recovery Unit (PRU) in Preston and more so, the PRU and Phoenix House Personnel Recovery Centre (PRC) based in Catterick, the charity now aims to broaden its horizons both geographically and in terms of its client base.

Newly appointed Volunteer Project Manager Matt Starmer will be working throughout the North of England to build a network of referral partners, to help target those most in need, and service providers that can help find bespoke volunteer programmes to best suit clients; this will also include a shift in client focus towards the veteran community. The charity's one-to-one client work aims to assist clients into better social situations, which in turn can support better mental health and wellbeing, improved social skills and where required, better prospects for future employment.

Contact: admin@step-together.org.uk

STEP TOGETHER
Transforming lives through volunteering

SCHOOLS' MENTOR SCHEME

Twelve ex-Service Armed Forces Veterans will be recruited by Lancashire County Council to join the Council's successful Ex-Service Personnel Mentors in Schools Programme.

We will be looking to begin recruitment in April and employment will start in September 2020. The programme exists to recruit, train and support former service personnel into mainstream Secondary Schools across the county for 12 months, where they train as Mentors supporting young people.

Each trainee mentor receives a comprehensive training package designed to support them through their placement and beyond, providing a valuable opportunity to gain new qualifications and experience whilst working towards longer-term outcomes. The programme has so far recruited over 80 veterans from every branch of the UK Armed Forces supporting in every district of Lancashire.

Our mentors have supported pupils in nearly 50 schools to overcome barriers to their inclusion, attendance and progression. Following their placement, mentors have progressed into a variety of new careers inside and outside of the Council, including, teaching, social care, pastoral work in schools, higher education and youth work. For an informal discussion about becoming our next mentor contact Adam Lewis, Employment Officer at Lancashire County Council adam.lewis@lancashire.gov.uk

**Ex-Service Personnel
Mentoring in Schools**

Lancashire
County Council 

BREAKFAST ANYONE?

Communities across Lancashire are benefiting from the development of Armed Forces and Veterans' Breakfast Clubs, where brews, banter and butties are the order of the day.

New clubs are being created all the time so to find out where and when your local club meets visit www.afvbc.net/find-a-club



YOUR ARMED FORCES CHAMPIONS

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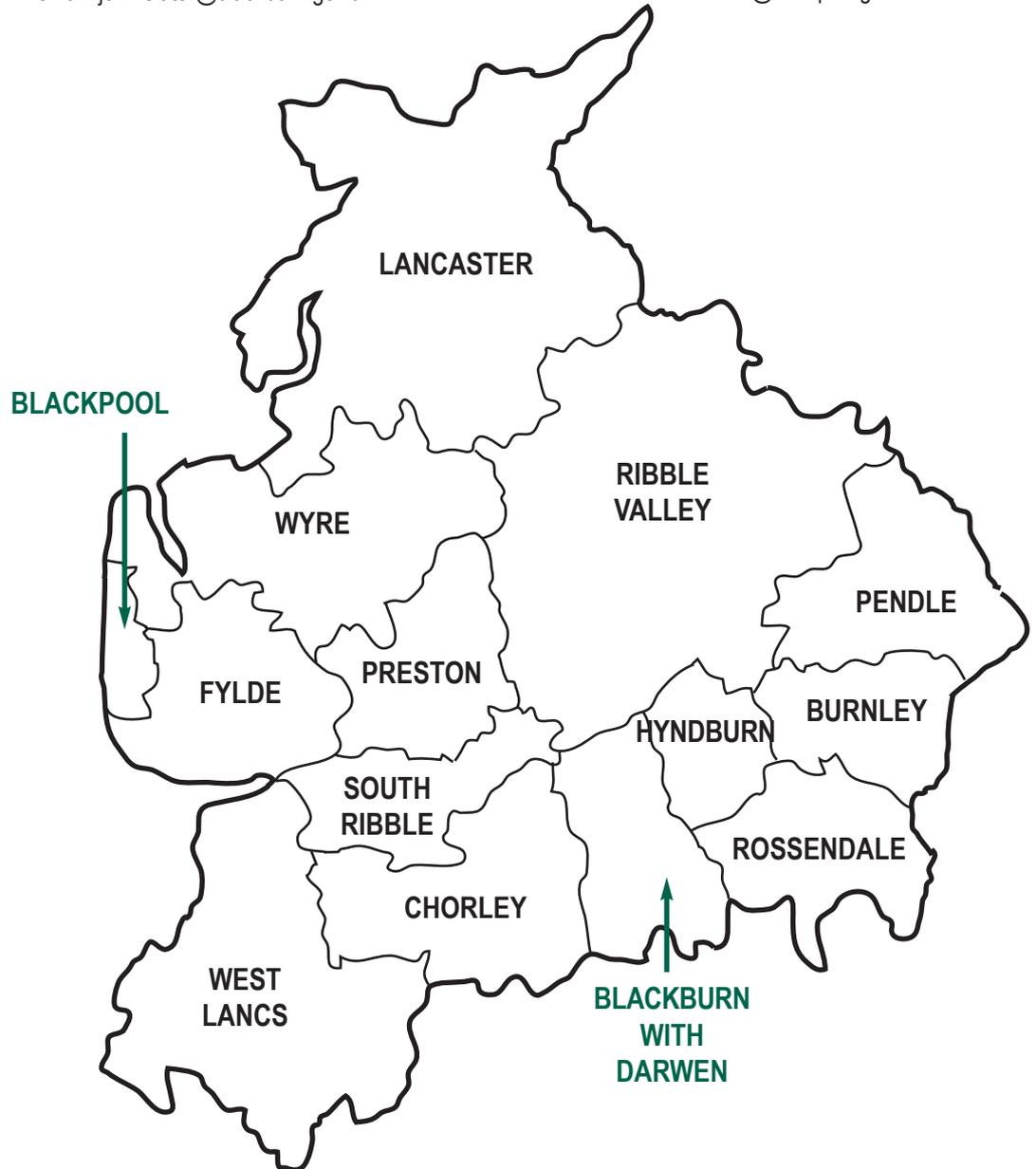
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WHERE TO GO FOR NEWS

Web content aimed at the armed forces community in Lancashire is starting to grow on Lancashire County Council's website.

Information about the Lancashire Hub and the Armed Forces Covenant now sits alongside details of specific support needs such as help with finding employment. Kieran Curran, lead officer for the Armed Forces Covenant at Lancashire County Council, said: "This Hub micro site is an important development in

ensuring our residents are provided with up to date information about the armed forces community. It also hosts the Lancashire AFC Newsletter where individuals can sign up for future copies. Anyone interested in Lancashire's military community can sign up to keep abreast of our developments."

The Hub has Facebook and Twitter pages, both of which can be accessed by following @LancsCovenant or log on to the website www.lancashire.gov.uk/armedforcescovenant