

# Lancashire strikes gold in support for its veterans

**Lancashire County Council (LCC) has been awarded the highest honour in the Ministry Of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme – reaching gold standard for the support it gives to people with former or current links to the Armed Forces.**

LCC policy manager Kieran Curran was required to collaborate with the council's Human Resources department to create policies which provide guidance for staff who are involved in the Armed Forces. That means staff who are military reservists or cadet force adult leaders can have two weeks paid leave to undertake their annual volunteer duties. It also gives guidance to council managers on the support available for staff members whose spouse is deployed on military duties.

Kieran said: "This is a tremendous achievement. A lot of people at the council worked very hard to get us here and we are absolutely delighted to have received the award."

The ERS scheme is administered by the

Reserve Forces & Cadet Association. Local representative Wing Cmdr Chris Ashworth said: "We congratulate Lancashire County Council on achieving this prestigious award and thank them for their continued enthusiasm and commitment. We hope it will also encourage other employers across Lancashire and beyond to support the Armed Forces Covenant and the Armed Forces community."

LCC Armed Forces Champion County Councillor Alf Clempson, *pictured*, said: "We want to make Lancashire the best place in the UK to live and work as a veteran and this award means we are on the right track. We asked our staff who are members of the Armed Forces community to come forward so we can better support them at work and we've identified more than 70 so far."



**NW RFCA**

RESERVE FORCES' AND CADETS' ASSOCIATION FOR  
THE NORTH WEST OF ENGLAND AND THE ISLE OF MAN



"We continue to recruit ex-service personnel to our school mentoring programme and are helping businesses across Lancashire to become more forces-friendly. Members of the Reserve and Cadet Forces make great employees and we want to do all we can to support them in the future. This award recognises Lancashire County Council's great commitment to the Armed Forces community throughout the county."

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace MP wrote to congratulate LCC Chief Executive Angie Ridgwell saying: "You should be proud to know that your organisation is one of 127 who were adjudged to have reached the required standard. Once again congratulations on achieving this prestigious award."

## REMEMBRANCE COMMEMORATIONS

Please check your local council websites and social media for information on Remembrance Day services as COVID restrictions may limit normal activities.

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# YOUR COVENANT AT WORK



## SEASIDERS' GRANT

**Securing an Armed Forces Covenant Trust grant for £20,000 just before the COVID-19 lockdown, ensured lifeline activities continued in Blackpool.**

The town's football club community trust has been running a programme for veterans since January 2018, when newly appointed Head of Community Programmes Jason White secured a grant from The Royal British Legion.

Trust Inclusion Officer Dave Marsland runs Extra Time for over 55s, many of whom are ex-Armed Forces. He said: "We introduced Zoom coffee mornings with around 12 attending; some do not have the tech to join so we keep in contact with telephone calls, by sending resources like the sporting pink paper. I also run an online quiz every Friday evening."

Dave has been filming local walks and posting them to the trust's Facebook page and has ex-pats now living in New Zealand and Brazil following them. To combat loneliness, garden gate meet ups were organised and in the future there are plans to recruit veteran volunteers to befriend people in care homes and appoint a full-time ex-Armed Forces person to support the veterans' provision.

The trust teamed up with The Fylde Memorial Arboretum and Community Woodland and work has been carried out to honour the team's footballers who made the ultimate sacrifice in the World Wars. Maz Mitchel, who served in the Royal Army Medical Corps for 15 years, said working on the arboretum had helped her cope with PTSD. She said: "When I am there I find it quite beneficial. Instead of focusing on my issues, I concentrate on cutting the grass and I got involved in planting flowers that had been donated. More veterans and serving personnel need to know about the arboretum and should get involved."

## LOCKDOWN SUPPORT

**More than 300 welfare contacts were made throughout the lockdown by Burnley FC in the Community (BFCitC) and the community kitchen to ensure veterans and their families were supported.**

The team also provided more than 50 food parcels and activity and welfare packs. Manager of the Veterans Project and Youth Crime Reduction Manager Ged Byrne said: "A lot of our projects had to be put on hold and went online, but we made sure that the veterans were always supported."

To acknowledge the hard work of Gregg Stevenson, BFCitC Veterans and Inclusion Officer, received a Special Contribution Award from Burnley MP Andrew Higginbotham (*he is pictured with the certificate*). Veterans also worked, at a safe distance, to develop the outdoor education provision at Whitehough in Pendle.



As part of Premier League Connecting Generations initiative, a young person wrote to a Second World War veteran and the activity really made a difference to both the young person and the veteran.

## CENTRE FACELIFT AND TECH

**Armed Forces Covenant Trust grants ensured Veterans In Communities could improve its base and maintain work with armed forces personnel throughout lockdown.**

A grant of £29,377 funded improvements to the centre in Haslingden, while a Veterans Should Not Be Forgotten grant of £16,445 enabled the charity to invest in tablets so that veterans could participate in online activities.

During lockdown, the outreach and project workers maintained regular phone contact with veterans, many centre activities went online and a new online photography course was a huge hit. Lessons in tablet usage were also held safely at the centre.



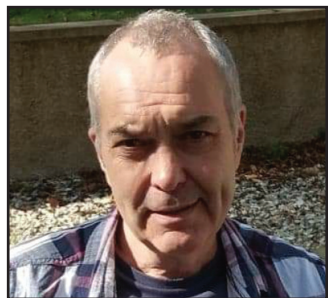
The VIC centre was manned daily, but not open to the public during lockdown. In August, the Hyndburn shop was able to reopen and the centre is now accessible by appointment, but visitors are limited and must adhere to COVID restrictions.

# YOUR COVENANT AT WORK

## FIRSTLIGHT WORKER

**FORMER** Police Officer Gary Heys has been appointed as a support worker with FirstLight Trust based at the Lancaster Hub.

He said: "To find myself in this profession after serving as a Police Officer for a number of years came as a surprise, not only to me but to anybody who knows me. However it still remains one of the best decisions I have made."



Gary said FirstLight is a dedicated charity and all the members of the team genuinely care for the veterans of the Armed Forces and the Blue Light services.

He said: "During the time I have been with FirstLight, the support and knowledge shared has been invaluable. My reward is, unlike in the Police Force, I see the beginning of support, I am involved with the support, and I then see the outcome of the support."

The Armed Forces Covenant has been instrumental in funding a number of FirstLight initiatives including financial advice for veterans, IT projects, and veteran drop-ins. Support for veterans now also involves activity-based support – this may include a virtual cookery class or more physical support, ie a walk in the Lake District.

Gary added: "I have been involved with all these activities, and the pleasure of experiencing this with the veterans is beyond belief. FirstLight is on your doorstep, embrace us, use us, and support us. We just might be the link you need."

## STAFF GET FORCES READY

Four training sessions on the Armed Forces community have now been delivered to NHS Primary Care staff by the Lancashire Armed Forces Covenant Hub.

The training has moved online to ensure compliance with recent government guidance on social distancing during COVID-19 and, although that provided some technical difficulties for trainers and participants, feedback showed a huge increase in participant knowledge and confidence to help veterans with their health needs.



The training encourages GP staff to ask patients if they have served in the Armed Forces and then to record this information on their NHS patient records. This allows NHS staff to provide bespoke veteran care services if patients experience future mental or physical health problems. As a member of the Armed Forces community; whether currently serving, military Reservist, veteran or family member, you can help by making sure your surgery knows your status and connection to the military community and check they have recorded you appropriately. Furthermore, if they are not already registered as a Veteran Friendly surgery, encourage them to join this national scheme run by the Royal College of GPs.

The scheme seeks to improve NHS knowledge of the Armed Forces and helps by advertising the practices' knowledge to their patients. Some surgeries are also looking to increase their contact with the military community by inviting them to join their patient participation groups. On the Fylde coast some practices are linking with their local veteran support organisations and directing their communications straight to veterans in their patient group.

Further training sessions will be run across Lancashire and tickets can be found by searching in Eventbrite – Armed Forces Training for NHS Primary Care Staff.

## RAILCARD UPDATE

A new railcard for veterans will hopefully be available in time for Armistice Day.

The Department of Transport hopes to release the card on November 11. It will initially cost £21, before rising to £30 and it will offer veterans one third off rail fares. Visit [www.veterans-railcard.co.uk](http://www.veterans-railcard.co.uk)

## LAPTOP DONATION

Two reconditioned laptops have been generously donated by Kent-based Computers4Charity to Lancashire Armed Forces Covenant Hub.



The laptops have been given to local charities Veterans In Communities and FirstLight. Computers4Charity provide reconditioned computers to charities and community groups across the UK and Africa. If you have old computer hardware or phones that could be donated, visit [www.computers4charity.org](http://www.computers4charity.org)



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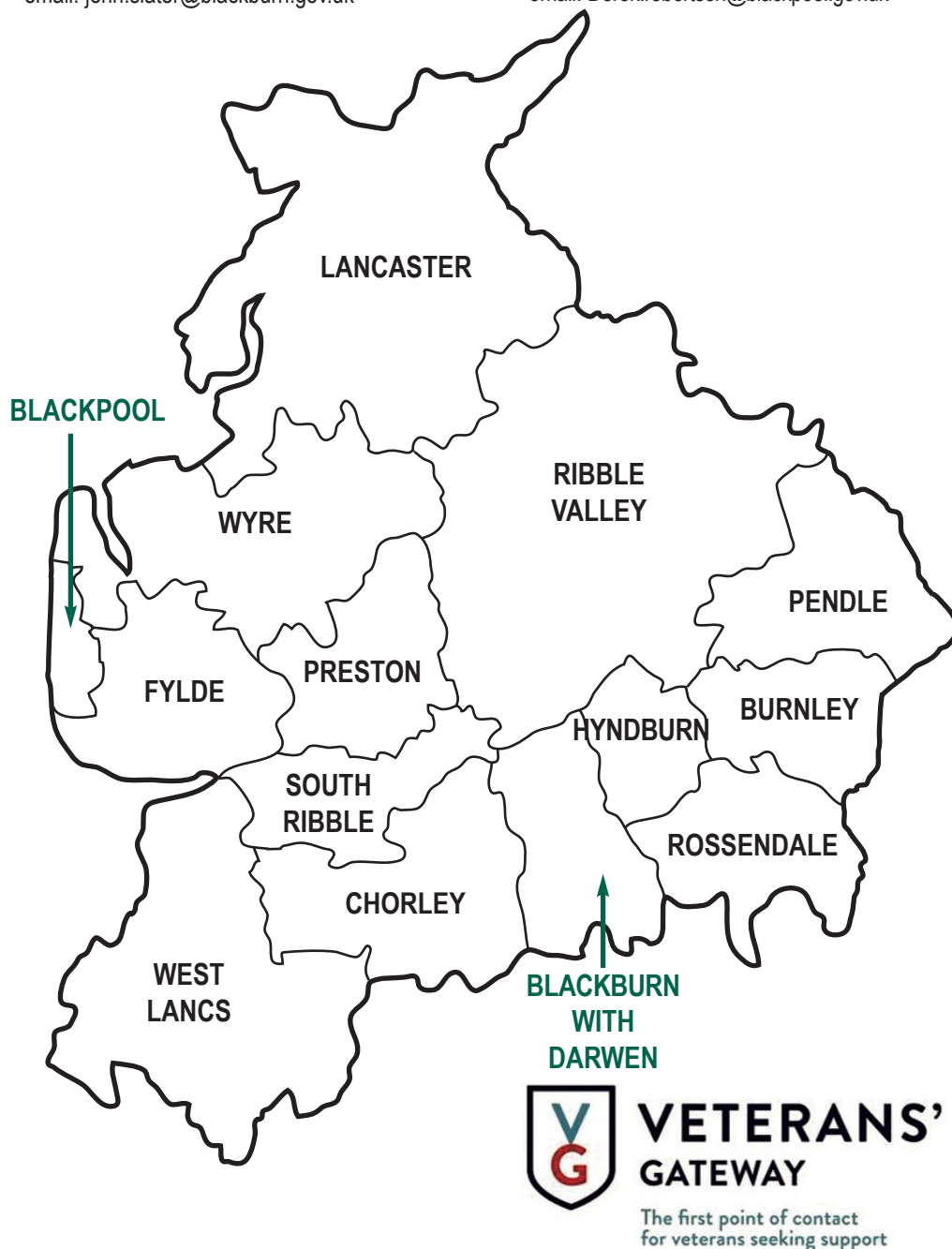
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## NEED HELP? TRY VETERANS' GATEWAY

**The military family is not just serving Armed Forces personnel and veterans, but also reservists and all of their families.**

As there are so many organisations and charities for military personnel and their families, it can be difficult to navigate the vast array of support organisations on offer and to understand what each one does.

The Veterans' Gateway acts as a single point of access to military charities and they have recently added an App to their armoury, which guides users to a range of Armed Forces support services in their local area.

The app is available to download now on iOS and Android. For more information visit:

[www.veteransgateway.org.uk](http://www.veteransgateway.org.uk)