

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

Thank you all for your help

I want to wish everyone a Happy Christmas and a safe and healthy 2021 and I would personally like to thank every single member of staff and all the volunteers for the way they have responded and stepped up throughout this pandemic.

They have delivered food, carried out socially distant welfare visits, groups have been run online, staff and volunteers have held fundraising activities and Veterans In Production have made many projects.

Some of our volunteers have been making soup and cakes and delivering it to members of the community and in Heywood we have volunteers making Christmas dinner for 15 and delivering it to people's homes.

This year we have had to find different ways of working and we have adopted a pro-active response to COVID and the ever-changing restrictions placed on us. We have remained open thanks to staff and volunteers who have provided support to existing and new members alike, reacted to needs and issues and responded to welfare, food and medication problems.

It was really hard adjusting to working remotely when we are such a hands-on face-to-face

organisation, but it was essential to be able to continue to support our members safely.

I had my first Zoom meeting before lockdown – with Rossendale Connected COVID Response – and from there I knew it was the way forward. Our group activities were quickly zoomed over and it has changed people's way of thinking and dealing with life.

People who have got involved in the groups that have been run online have said they felt part of a family and they formed new friendships. Some participants, who were not able to attend groups in the centre could access the online Zoom meetings.

We worked in partnership with Positive Start to deliver food parcels to those who were isolating and this strengthened our relationship.

As we get to the end of 2020 and look to the future, we have to assess the way we run things and learn from this experience as we start to get back to some normality. We need to take forward some of the new initiatives we have introduced this year and combine those with our traditional ways of working so that we create a dynamic future for VIC.

Amanda Walton
Chief Executive



Holiday availability

THE VIC Centre will not be open for activities during the Christmas and New Year holidays, but it will be manned from December 28 to New Year's Eve from 10am to 3pm for anyone needing to contact staff.
Normal opening will resume on January 5.

We'll meet again

2020 brought an 'Invisible Enemy' into our world that appeared to create more restrictions on our lives and livelihoods than the World Wars and other natural disasters beyond our control.

But, as happens in many such circumstances, the camaraderie and community spirit rose to the fore, protecting and looking out for those more vulnerable than ourselves.

I am so proud of the way the team at VIC quickly adapted to ensure our members and the community at large received as much support as was humanly possible working within the constraints of being Covid-19 secure. I would like to thank Amanda for exploring and seizing every funding opportunity and to the funders for their support.

The stop/start effect of lockdowns, with ever-varying guidance and rules, has been enough to test the Mental Health of our most level-headed and law-abiding citizens. Through the tiers and tears, at last there is light at the end of the tunnel. Just like buses, not one but three vaccines are almost 'readied' for use in record time, so hopefully 2021 will bring back some form of normality.

Unfortunately though, the PM's Festive relaxation of rules will not allow us to meet up for our VIC Annual Dinner.

All that remains for me to say is 'Thank you' for all that you do as staff and volunteers for VIC, stay safe, keep well, and enjoy a happy and healthy New Year and 'We'll meet again' as soon as we can.

Ronnie Barker
Chair of VIC





Caring for the VIC family

I HAVE made regular care calls to veterans and many people have said I was the only person who had phoned them.

Some of the veterans in my area have no family and receive no visitors. They missed going to The Sandbag Café.

These calls can be anything from five minutes to over an hour. It is important that we maintained this regular contact because it makes sure the veterans feel valued and a part of the VIC family.

They told me that our chats had cheered them up and brightened their day and I get satisfaction knowing that what we do for VIC is appreciated; especially in lockdown.

We have accessed a free meal delivery service from The Veterans' Kitchen Manchester and one of our volunteers and his wife make fresh soups and cakes and deliver them weekly.



Newsletters have been hand delivered to our members who love to read them and our volunteers have made socially distant visits to provide support and welfare checks.

I gave support to a recently bereaved widow who said it had been difficult to meet with friends to talk because of the pandemic so my calls meant so much.

I know so much more about our members now it's almost like having a one to one chat about military history.

I always ask if they have food and medication, whether they need access to a GP and I make sure they feel empowered to ask for support if it is needed.

One member has now joined Facebook and got in contact with family; he's overjoyed. I feel very privileged to do my job.

Bev Fowler
Project Worker

Silver surfers

TWO of our members are officially Silver Surfing on multiple platforms thanks to a tablet loaned from VIC.

Roland and Sheila Dunn received their tablet and training here at the VIC and within the week they were engaging with our Facebook group, Googling for fun and had had their first ever live video chat with their daughter, son-in-law and grandson who live in America.

They called into the Accrington Drop-in Centre and asked to say 'a great big thank you' to VIC. They said the tablet had opened up their world to endless possibilities.

Roland asked me if I could find out if there were any lads from the Kings at VIC and I told them both that they could ask Google, or try Facebook groups to see if there were any associations. He got very excited and keen to search. Roland has since been in

contact with comrades he once served with in Germany.

All in all there has been a fantastic take-up of digital technology in the pursuit of objectives, seeing family overseas was a great result.

More than 30 digital tablets have been loaned out to VIC members and this has come with continuous training and advice from Outreach Workers and volunteers; some people have taken to the technology easier than others.

As well as teaching people to access the various communication platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp and GMail, we have put together a package of tutorials about protecting themselves from internet fraud and scams. VIC has a duty of care to our members and we need to protect them from some of the online fraudsters and how they operate.

Ray Sharkey
Project Worker



Creatively evolving to meet the challenges



VIC, by its nature, is military and we are doers. As a can-do organisation, if there is an issue we immediately think how can we sort it; and that is just what we did.

We have been quite creative in working out how we could do things differently and most importantly safely and within the rules, which have been constantly changing often at lightning speed.

It has been a very difficult year; we have had to start working in different ways and some ways which we were not very comfortable with. I had as much of a struggle getting used to using Zoom as anyone as I had never used it before. We had to try to find alternatives to continue to support the participants on my project and phone calls were not the same as face-to-face. I was so

pleased when we were able to get back into the centre and meet people in person again.

The feedback I have had from participants has been really positive and we have also managed to engage some new people onto the project.

I think we have been successful because VIC has been so pro-active. We have made sure the community knew we were still out there, not just for veterans and

emergency services but there to help everyone when a need was identified.

I don't think VIC as an organisation would have been comfortable to take a back seat so we didn't. I am looking forward to the vaccine being rolled out to everyone and us being able to get back to normal.

Gill Hughes
Transformational Coach



Grants boosted 2020 work



FIVE key grants have helped to support the work of VIC this year and allowed us to invest in making sure our veterans stayed in contact with each other.

An Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust grant of £16,445 – as part of the Veterans Should Not Be Forgotten Programme – allowed the purchase of tablets

and this initiated a programme to reduce social isolation. Our groups, which had become online meetings, could then be accessed by all.

A further Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust grant of £14,269 was awarded as part of the Covid-19 Impact Programme. This funding was made available to pay ongoing running costs

that would ordinarily have been paid for from fundraising income streams which had ceased because of the pandemic.

We were also able to obtain £4,952.34 from the Lancashire Community Foundation and this was to run a new project – a hugely successful 12-week online photography course utilising smart phones or simple

cameras, which meant the course was inclusive for all.

We received £500 from Tesco, which helped towards fuel and volunteer costs when we were making food deliveries during lockdown.

We also received £300 from Asda after we were nominated in recognition of the community support we had provided during Covid-19.

Fundraiser

PATIENTS and staff at the Priory Kemple View in Langho raised £103 by selling crafts created at VIC.

One of our members Adrian set a stall up as this year we were unable to go ourselves due to the current COVID restrictions.

Thank you from everyone at VIC.



Wool appeal

WHEN we asked for wool for our Crafty Chatters we were amazed to receive this huge donation.

It will now be used by one of our wonderful members to crochet blankets for us to sell in our Accrington shop.

Choir message

A FESTIVE online musical Christmas message has been recorded by the VIC Choir.

Eight members of the choir recorded 'Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas' at the first Christmas practice of 2020, all held in Covid secure conditions.

Artists unite

A SPECIAL live link webinar to Australia united fine artist Graeme Stevenson with members of VIC and the Veterans Arts Organisation.

The Zoom meeting was held on December 3 with the founder and presenter of the Australian TV programme 'Colour in your Life' and his UK representative Ian Walton.

Colour in your Life can be seen on TV and many digital platforms. In each programme Graeme travels to meet a different artist, they give a demonstration of their work, explain the medium they like to work in and give a brief biography.

In March 2020, as the world was put on standstill due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Graeme's travels were also temporarily halted, but his team came up with the idea of virtual travels, so he could sit alongside the guest artists with the help of technology.

It was while watching a broadcast on YouTube, where he was describing his intentions to move the programme forward, that I had the idea of making him aware of what Darren had set up at

VIC and with the Veterans Arts Organisation Facebook page.

In response to my email, I received a phone call from Australia on a

cold windy morning while I was teaching our Chief Executive, how to fish.

Graeme wanted to meet us via Zoom, to find out more about how we promoted art for the benefit of mental health and wellbeing, within the veteran community and the wider veteran family.

I think it would be fair to say that he was impressed, and he went on to make a vlog about us on the Colour in your Life website and social media platforms and promised to stay in touch.

I contacted Graeme to thank him and his team for sparing us their time and something even bigger came out as a result of that email conversation.

It turns out that his partner Jo Frederiks is also an extraordinarily talented artist in her own right and her work inspired both Darren and I to commit to a joint project.



Darren's favourite subject matter is the great apes and other endangered wildlife and he has previously donated his paintings to animal charities and one to save a zoo.

I would urge you to visit Jo's website and look at her work then view the opening of her exhibition The Animal Holocaust by Philip Wollen on YouTube. Then you will understand why we have decided to do our bit.

Although I was initially disappointed at the number of participants that attended the open Zoom meeting in December, those who attended got a lot more out of it than I think they would have had been more people involved.

A recording of the whole programme is available on VIC's YouTube channel.

Steve Butterworth
Outreach Worker



Art competition results

THE winners have been announced in our first Veterans' Art Competition.

Organiser Steve Butterworth thanked all the judges who gave up their time and the veterans and veterans' families who submitted work.

He said: "This will now become an annual event and we are hoping that we can attract even more people to submit work into the competition next year.

"We decided to hold the art competition because the art classes had to move online and we wanted this to be a way of bringing everyone together, not just local members but veterans from other art groups and the Facebook Veterans Art Organisation.

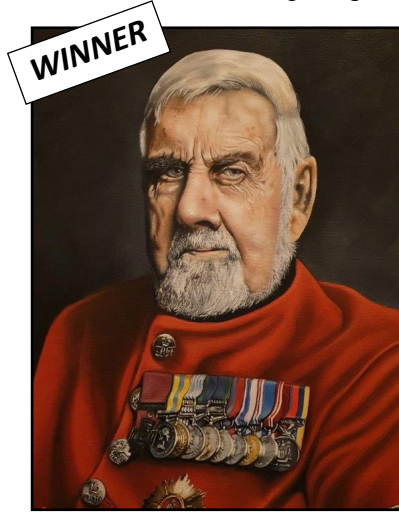
"I would like to thank all the judges who gave up their time to go through the entries and select the winners and

runners up and to Hobbycraft who generously donated prizes.

The classes were:
Painting – judged by renowned aviation and maritime artist Derek Blois; **Photography** – judged by Emma Holt of Emma Holt Photography, **Creative Writing** – judged by Northwest Poet and Rossendale Radio DJ Paul Jenkins, **Sculpture** and the **Special Lockdown Art** – judged by VIC Chair Ronnie Barker and other judges.

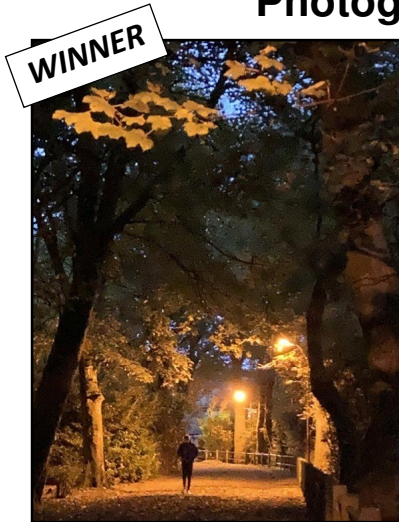
Steve added: "Next year we are hoping to involve even more veterans organisations including: Forgotten Veterans' UK, Borough of Bury Veterans Association, Lancashire Veterans UK South Atlantic Association, Bravo 22 Company, Soldiers Arts Academy and the Armed Forces Veteran Artists and Illustrators Portfolio UK."

Painting



Winner Paul Phillips – oil painting of a Chelsea Pensioner
Runner-up Phillip Bromley – cross stitch poppy field

Photography

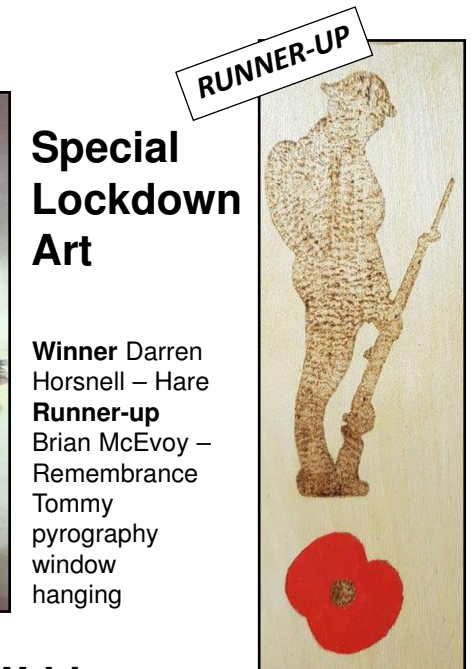


Winner Carol Duckworth
Runner-up Dee Lomas

Sculpture



Winner Bob Elliott – silhouette Remembrance Tommy
Runner-up Ginge Hiscutt – candlestick



Special Lockdown Art

Winner Darren Horsnell – Hare
Runner-up Brian McEvoy – Remembrance Tommy pyrography window hanging

Creative Writing

Winner Catherine Smyth short story – Coming Home
Runner-up Graham Limb – poem 2020



Coffee table labour of love

FORMER soldier Brian McEvoy has completed his biggest challenge yet – to create a bespoke coffee table from reclaimed materials.

The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers veteran has been a member of Veterans In Communities since the charity opened a shop at the Accrington Arndale in June 2018.

Brian, from Clayton-le-Moors, is supported at VIC through the Building Better Opportunities, Changing Futures Project, which is funded by the Community Fund and the European Social Fund.

Photographs of his hard work have been shared on social media

and led to him being recognised in his local Co-op by someone who said they admired the work he had done.

Brian had seen a picture of a coffee table made using recycled materials to look industrial and decided he wanted to recreate his own version.

He is part of the pyrography group at VIC and has undertaken a number of different art projects since joining the charity.

Brian said: "At night I spend a long time searching for ideas for my pyrography and other art ideas on the internet. One night I saw something that got me thinking."

"There is a big difference to having an idea and getting the job

done and this was my first real attempt at something like this."

He was assisted by Bernard Tighe, who runs Veterans in Production at VIC's base in Haslingden and Operations Manager Bob Elliott.

Brian said: "It was a nerve-racking task for me and I couldn't have finished it without them. Now I have made one of these tables I should be ok doing the next one."

The process involved him getting an old beam, which he battered and burned using an axe, a hammer and a flame thrower. The table legs were made from steel pipes and he used a recycled glass coffee table top to complete the piece.



Brian said: "I felt quite anxious at times while making it because I couldn't see the progress we were making. I was constantly reassured by the guys and in the end, everything did turn out well."

"I now look forward to seeing this table in a living room, conservatory or patio."

He wants to sell the

table and donate the proceeds to VIC.

Operations Manager Bob Elliott said: "Well done Brian for creating an outstanding piece of furniture. Anybody interested in buying the table can contact the office on 01706 833180. We are looking for offers of around £350. I'm sure this will look very good in the right setting."

Christmas cheer

A HUGE number of hampers were donated to VIC to help bring cheer to veterans across our area at Christmas.

Operations Manager Bob Elliott said: "The Haslingden Branch of The Royal British Legion and VIC were gifted a large amount of Christmas Hampers that had been donated to The Royal British Legion by Compass Group.



"Some of these were given to Football Clubs and organisations supporting veterans across the region: Burnley FC, Preston FC, Blackpool FC, Sale Sharks RFC, Wigan HQ, First Light Trust, local RBL beneficiaries put forward by the RBL caseworkers and the Haslingden RBL as well as members of VIC."

Donations were received from Asda, Tesco Burnley, The Shine Project at Kay Street Baptist Church, Trinity Baptist Church, Positive Start and food and treats were handed into our centre.

Lending a hand

VIC was happy to assist when West Lancashire Integrated Neighbourhood Team requested help for an elderly veteran.

John, who served in the Royal Artillery, was having difficulties using the stairs to get up to his bedroom and had been provided with an electric bed but needed help setting it up downstairs.

Two members of VIC attended and while visiting they also explained about the 'Veterans Should Not be Forgotten' project and a tablet was offered so that he could contact his

family, and have access to the internet. Once Armed Forces Breakfast Clubs start up again, he is interested in attending to meet other veterans.

We were also asked by a veteran's daughter if we could power wash a veteran's patio that had become slippery.

VIC member Brian McEvoy was only too happy to help and he found that the driveway and paths also needed cleaning. A few hours later he completed the whole job at the Helmshore property, much to the delight of the family.

RIP Bob Graham



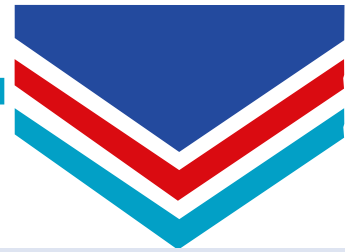
IT IS with sadness that we have to report that VIC member Bob Graham passed away peacefully last month.

Bob volunteered at the Accrington Veterans Drop-in and became one of our regular volunteers in the Summer of 2019.

He was the first to introduce himself to people coming into the shop at the Arndale, had a great sense of humour and was very much liked by the team.

Bob served in the Scots Guard from 1963 to 1977 and was on operational tours in Malaysia, Borneo and Northern Ireland.

Veterans lined up at the top of road going into the crematorium.



ROSSENDALE

NOTE COVID CHANGES TO ACTIVITIES

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

Outreach Service

MONDAY-FRIDAY

9am-4.30pm

VIC Centre, Bury Road, Haslingden, BB4 5PL.

Call 01706 833180

TUESDAY

ON ZOOM

Art Group

12.30pm

WEDNESDAY

ON LOCATION

Allotment

Help on the allotment in Holcombe Road, Helmshore. Contact 01706 833180

THURSDAY

STILL SUSPENDED

VIC Choir

6.30-8.30pm

FRIDAY

ON ZOOM

Art Group

12.30pm

EVERY MONTH

ON ZOOM

Painting in the Style of Bob Ross art classes

Contact Darren 01706 833180

ON LOCATION

Walking Group

Restricted numbers see Facebook or website for details.

BY INVITATION ONLY

Rossendale Armed Forces and Veterans' Breakfast Club

Haslingden Community Link

9.30am-11.30pm

Espresso's Coffee Shop, The Old Chapel, Ebenezer Terrace, Billington, BB7 9NN.

BURNLEY AND PENDLE

Outreach Service

TUESDAY - alternate weeks

Breakfast Club at Burnley FC in the Community Centre, Charter Walk.

9am-11am

Contact 01706 833180 for dates of outreach at Burnley FC in the Community, Armed Forces Support Group, Holmefield House, Gisburn Road, Barrowford, at Morrisons in Nelson and Asda in Colne.

HEYWOOD, MIDDLETON AND ROCHDALE

BY INVITATION ONLY

The Sandbag Cafe and drop in

TUESDAY

10am-noon

Sandon House, Taylor Street, Heywood OL10 1EF.

VIC Outreach

TUESDAY

12.30pm-2.30pm

Middleton Gardens, M24 1AB

The Mess This cafe and drop in

1pm-2.30pm

The Lighthouse Project, Middleton Shopping Centre, M24 1AB.

THURSDAY

BY INVITATION ONLY

9am-10.30am Rochdale Breakfast Club

Rochdale Town Hall Bistro OL16 1AB.

10.30am-noon

VIC Outreach

1 Riverside, Rochdale OL3 1JB.

HYNDBURN

FRIDAY

Outreach Service

10.30am-3pm

VIC Shop, Accrington Arndale Centre, BB5 1PL.

RIBBLE VALLEY

Outreach Service

TUESDAYS

VIC – 01706 833180

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Project Worker Ray Sharkey

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Transformational Coach Gill Hughes

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Volunteer Support Worker Mel Fitzgerald

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Arts and Crafts Co-ordinator Darren Horsnell

darrenhorsnell@vic.org.uk

Outdoor Activities Co-ordinator Ivy Limbrick

ivylimbrick@vic.org.uk

Sessional Worker Bernard Tighe

bernardtighe@vic.org.uk

VIC Choir Bookings Barry Hyde

barryhyde@vic.org.uk

Contacts

Combat Stress Helpline

0800 138 1619

NHS Military Veterans Psychological

Therapies Service (NW)

0300 323 0707

The Royal British Legion

0808 802 8080 7 days a week 8am-8pm

SSAFA

email Lancashire@ssafo.org.uk

01772 260 462

Rossendale Citizens' Advice

0300 456 2552

The Samaritans

01282 694929 Mon to Fri 9am-9pm

Freephone 116 123

Mental Health Helpline

0800 915 4640 Mon to Fri 7pm - 11pm Sat

& Sun 12 noon to 12 midnight

Royal Air Forces Association

0800 018 2361

Veterans UK Free Helpline

0808 1914 218

East Lancashire Single Point of Access

via GP or self-referral

01282 657116

Bolton Armed Forces Centre 4 Veterans

www.bafc4v.org

01204 776628

VIC supported

by:



Find us on Facebook

www.facebook.com/VICVeteransInCommunities