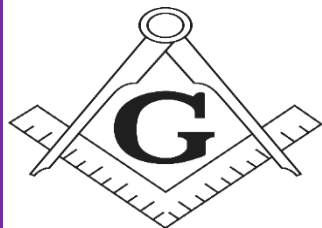


Veterans Community Network Annual Report 2023-24

With Grateful Thanks to our Funders and Donors



Bedfordshire & Luton
Community Foundation



**PROUDLY
SUPPORTING
THOSE WHO
SERVE.**



EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME

SILVER AWARD 2021
Proudly serving those who serve.



**Our Standards
and
Memberships**

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Reference and Administration Details

Charity Name	Veterans Community Network
Registered Charity Number	1191970
Charity's Principal Address	Union House 111, New Union Street Coventry CV1 2NT
Accountant and Independent Examiner	Streets Chartered Accountants

Chair of Trustees Foreword



The 2023/24 financial year has been a challenging one. VCN lost funding in Northamptonshire and faced a number of other issues but continued to deliver the high standards of assistance and service, for which we are known, and have had some amazing outcomes across all of our regions.

Our monthly social activities and hubs saw high levels of attendance and were boosted by a number of new beneficiaries attracted by the reputation of VCN.

VCN attended the Standing with Giants event in Oxford during February, which was a particularly rewarding event. Along with some of our beneficiaries, we played a small part in creating some of the 1,745 silhouettes created for the D-Day 80 memorial exhibition 'For Your Tomorrow' at Normandy. To highlight the significance of the event, I would like to reflect the sentiments of one of our Veterans:

"I visited Standing with Giants in Oxfordshire and the job they do is absolutely fantastic which is all for the love of those who made the ultimate sacrifice. First of all, we watched a video which was very emotional, and the making and painting of the figures was just amazing. As a veteran myself, to be part of that history was one of the most moving things I have ever done."

VCN will always put the care and support of our military communities in the forefront of everything we do; with strong partnership working, excellent results are achieved.

Pat Haslam, Chair of Trustees



About Us

Veterans Community Network was constituted on 10 June 2020 and commenced its charitable activities on 23 October 2020. The trustees present their third Trustees' Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024.

The aim of VCN is to support Veterans, Reservists, and their families in accessing the treatment and support services to help cope, adjust and manage situations such as mental health, housing, benefits, and social isolation. We do this through our network of trained Veteran Peer Mentors combined with 1-1 intensive support and a wide range of social prescribing activities. Our goal is to improve mental health and wellbeing to help veterans, and their families live fulfilling lives after their service. The trustees that have managed the Charity during the period are as follows:

Trustee name	Position	Date of Appointment	Date of Resignation
Dr Gillian Le Page	General Trustee	28 January 2022	1 February 2024
Keith Le Page	General Trustee	5 May 2022	On-going
Peter Sortwell	General Trustee	5 May 2022	3 May 2023
Patricia Haslam	General Trustee	7 July 2022	On-going
Hannah Cruickshank	General Trustee	3 May 2023	On-going



Structure, Governance and Management



The Charity is constituted as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation under the Charity Commission 'Foundation' model. The Charity is managed by its trustees, which currently number four. The Service Director, Dr Gillian Le Page, deals with all operational matters relating to the delivery of peer mentoring services. The other trustees deal with administrative and financial matters according to their particular area of experience.

The other trustees have been recruited in order to provide the Charity with a broad mix of such experience.

Related parties

Dr Gillian Le Page and one of the other trustees, Keith Le Page, are related parties by family connection. Whenever a conflict of interest had arisen because of this connection, the relevant decision was taken solely by the independent trustees Patricia Haslam, and Hannah Cruickshank.

Our objective: To relieve the needs of and to promote the good health and wellbeing of ex-service personnel (HM Armed Forces) and reservists and their families living in Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, and South Leicestershire. In particular but not exclusively by providing them with help and assistance and by offering them a professionally supervised social prescribing and peer mentor led care co-ordination service to expert support providers for their benefit and in such other ways as the trustees consider fit.

Our Activities

During this reporting period, VCN's main source of funding continued to be from the Armed Forces Covenant Trust (AFCT) Veterans People, Places Pathways Grant (V PPP) programme. We were lucky enough to have additional funding from The Veterans Foundation which enabled us to open for an extra day at RVP at Sharnbrook. Generous funding from the Frank Branstons Trust also helped us to buy a polytunnel, outdoor picnic bench and various items for the garden. We are also grateful to Amazon and the Provincial Grand Lodge in Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire for their generous donations

The Veterans Rendezvous Point (RVP) at Sharnbrook yielded a fantastic harvest this year with many of our beneficiaries being able to take home vegetable boxes to share with their families.

Our 'Tile Project' also saw the creation of some fantastic, decorated tiles which we will use to decorate the kitchen area of the Garrison Tea room at Sharnbrook.



For the second year running, we also partnered with the Defence Garden Scheme to deliver Horticulture Therapy Programme at Chicksands in Bedfordshire.

VCN also formed a choir led by Tina Griffiths who did a fantastic job of getting them ready for their performance as part of the South East Veterans Voices event held at St Mary's Church in Portsmouth in December 2023.



Monthly Activities

Tea and Banter	Every Tuesday with the exception of the Third Tuesday	Online via Zoom
Bedford Veterans Brunch Club	First Saturday of the month	North End Social Club, Bedford
Bedford Drop-in	Third Tuesday of the month	North End Social Club, Bedford
Veterans Get Together	Second Monday of the month	Rivets Sports and Social Club, Aylesbury
Veterans Fire Station Walk-in	First Thursday of the month	West Ashlands Fire Station, Blue Light Hub, Milton Keynes
Wellingborough Hub	Every fourth Wednesday	The Masonic Hall, Wellingborough
Veterans Fire Station Walk-in	First Wednesday of every month	Dunstable Community Fire Station, Brewers Hill Road, Luton
Wellingborough Breakfast Club	Third Saturday of the month	Ock n' Dough, Wellingborough
Sharnbrook RVP	Tuesday, Thursday & Sunday	Sharnbrook. Park Lane, Bedfordshire
Defence Garden Scheme	Each Wednesday morning for 10 weeks	Chicksands, Shefford, Bedfordshire

Veterans Get Together



Fire Station Walk-in MK



Bedford Brunch



Wellingborough Breakfast



Additional Events

Other social events held this year include:

- Naseby Battlefield Tour November 2023
- Bedford Garden Party in July 2023
- Standing with Giants Tour February 2024
- Bedford Veterans Christmas Party December 2023

Naseby Battlefield



"It was a fantastic tour, getting to know the history on our doorstep. The re-enactment was fabulous. Really enjoyed it, just a shame about the weather!"

Bedford Garden Party



"The sun shone; the band played. Great afternoon out. Thank you!"

Standing with Giants



"It was truly humbling to take part in this event. Thank you for organising."

VCN Choir singing at the Christmas Party



"Loved Jingle Bells Rock and the 12 Days of Christmas."

Achievements and Performance – Dr Gill Le Page, Service Director

During this reporting period, VCN has faced some difficult challenges which have been outside of our control. Unfortunately, this has resulted in a significant amount of time being spent protecting our organisational reputation. Despite this, VCN has shown incredible resilience in the face of adversity, and we are grateful that after nearly 2 ½ years, we can as we enter into 2025, draw a line under this difficult time and move forward.

VCN is very grateful to our funders and partners who have supported us during this difficult time. I am particularly grateful to the staff team and Trustees who have given their unwavering support. This has allowed VCN to continue to deliver its excellent services to our veteran community and deliver fantastic outcomes for our beneficiaries.

The VCN staff team has taken full advantage of the Combat Stress Learning Platform which we had access to as part of the V PPP portfolios. This gives further confidence that VCN Peer Mentors have the required skills to undertake their roles.

I am also proud to announce that VCN was awarded the Mental Health Awareness Standard (VMHAS) in 25 April 2023.

In December 2023, the main V PPP funding came to an end. VCN took an active part in the follow up consultation phase in Eastern and South East Regions which provided us some interim funding which covered the period of January 2024 –September 2024.

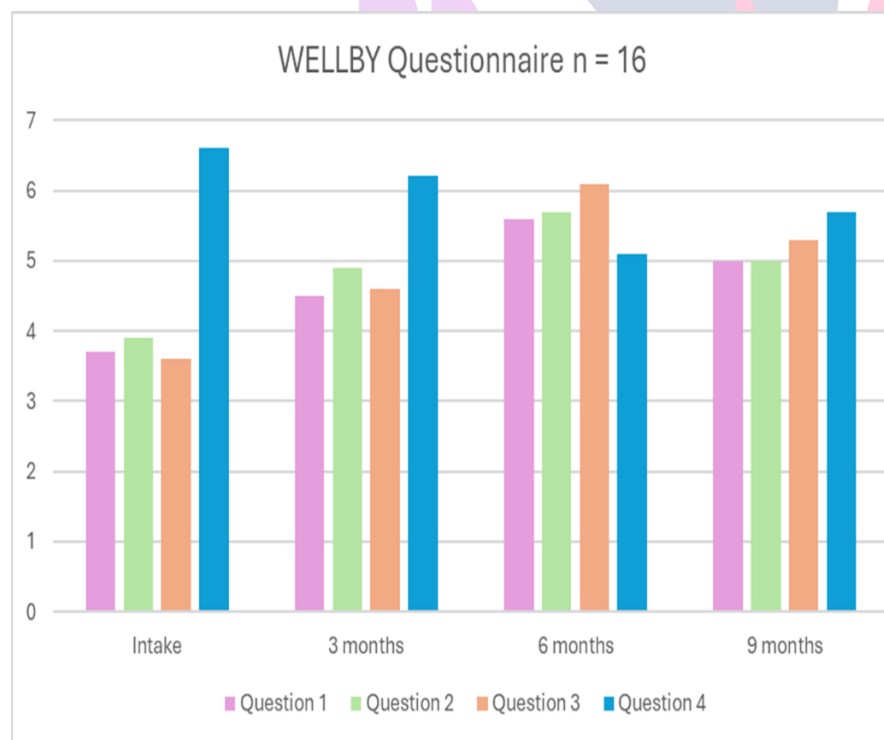
Our fundraising allowed us once again to provide a free buffet for our Veterans in Bedford, which I know was very much enjoyed. My special thanks go to both the Northend Club in Bedford, the Masonic Hall in Wellingborough, Ock n Dough, Wellingborough and the Rivets Social Club, who have continued to provide their venues free of charge.

Despite the changes to our funders in the Midlands, VCN continued to provide services in Northamptonshire. We are grateful to both West Northamptonshire Council and North Northamptonshire Council for their financial support.

I am delighted to present the outcomes for all three projects for the reporting period. Quarterly rolling targets were set at the project commencement in relation to the number of beneficiaries who had accessed the service to date.

Veterans Rendezvous Point (RVP), Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire

During this reporting period, the RVP and the Garrison tearoom continued to take shape. The raised beds were fully established and yielded a significant harvest of produce including lettuce, tomatoes, potatoes, pumpkins, beans, courgetti and peppers. In partnership with McFarland Horticulture, we ran an 8 week therapeutic gardening course 'Down to Earth'. Our evaluation of the programme in March 2023 found the following outcomes:



Improved quality of life as measured by the ONS4 Well Being Scale: Tinkler, L., & Hicks, S. (2011).

Measuring subjective well-being. Office for National Statistics.

The overall average improvement score is 5.

HM Treasury Green Book which currently values each 1-point improvement on the ONS4 Wellby Scale has a central value of £13,000.

Low-high range of £10,000 to £16,000) in terms of economic value (2019 prices).

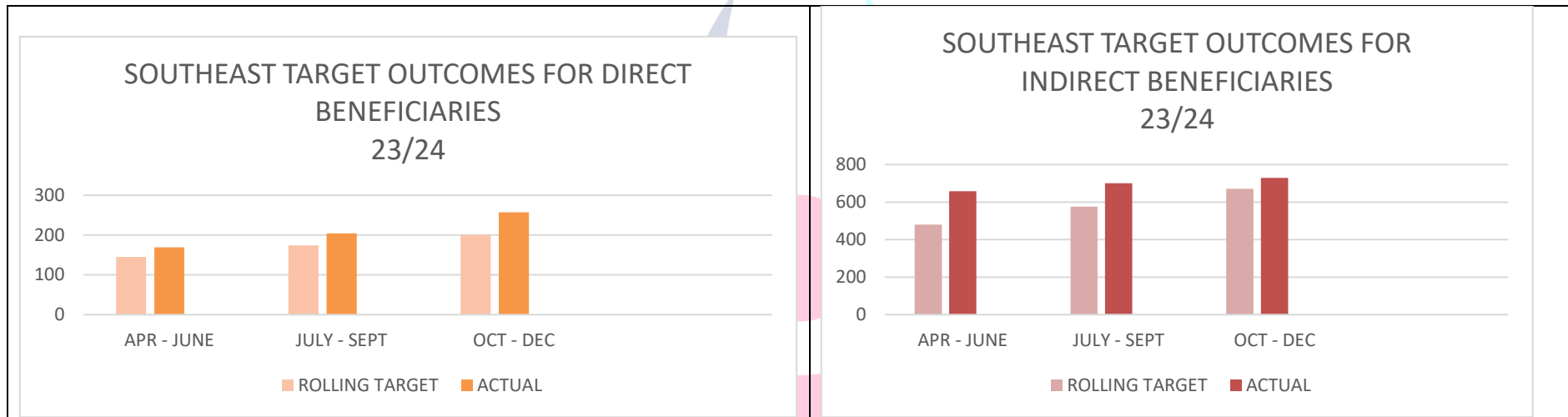
Savings to the public purse, £50,000 (low) up to £80,000 (high).

"I really enjoy coming to the RVP and spending time with other veterans. We have a good laugh; it really cheers me up."

"Being able to come to the RVP gives me something to look forward to and a reason to get out of bed which is really important when my mood is low."

"I've had a mental health crisis this year. Coming to the RVP and working outside really helps me to keep calm. I can speak to a peer mentor if I want to, just knowing they are there makes me feel safe."

South East (Buckinghamshire). Portfolio Lead: Veterans Outreach Support. Peer Support Worker: Paul Dunkley

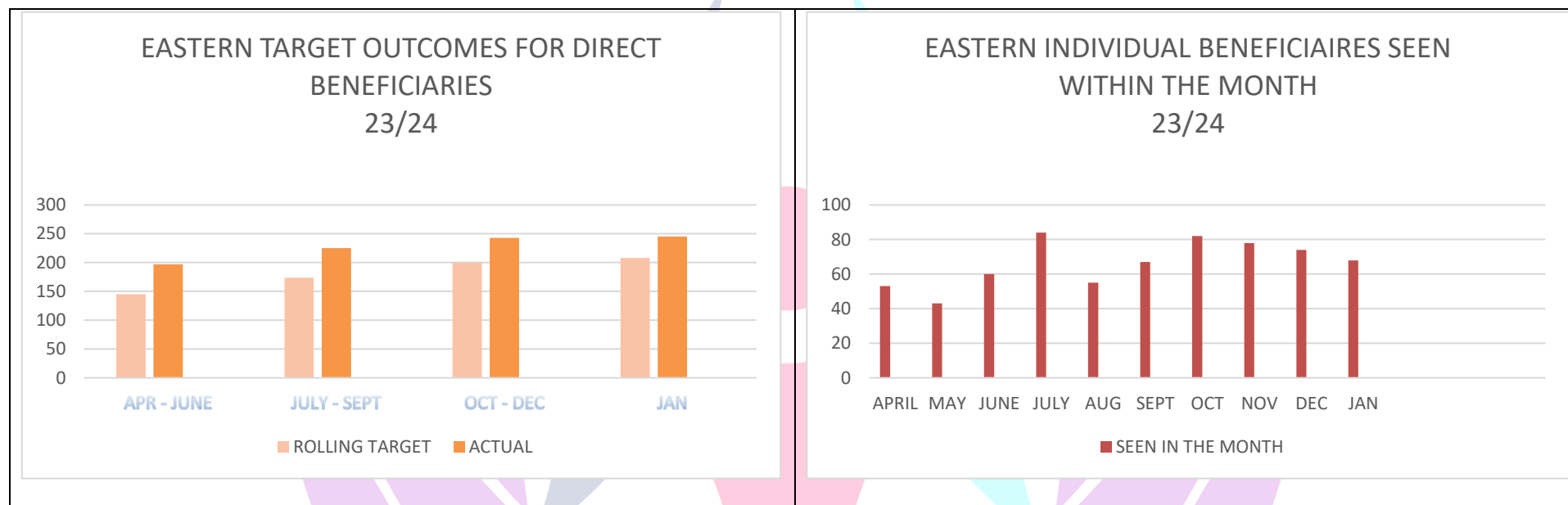


Beneficiary Case Study

A notable success story for me during this period was I fully supported one of my veterans throughout his difficult War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Chamber (WPAFCC) tribunal appeal from the start to the finish of this challenging process. This beneficiary had served in the Army and had been in operational theatres in the Gulf. He experienced racial bullying during his service and as a result of traumatic experiences during operational tours, was diagnosed with service-related PTSD. He had previously applied for compensation but was not successful. I supported him through the appeal process, working closely with the RBL. I attended with him at the final hearing in London and we were so relieved when he managed to win his appeal, and a month later, he finally received the compensation that he truly deserved. On reflection, it is moments like these that make me so pleased and reinforce why I love doing this job and working for VCN.

"It was hard enough having to deal with the battle outside the camp. Being bullied by a senior left me feeling unsafe inside the camp, which should have been a place of safety for me. I felt constantly under attack."

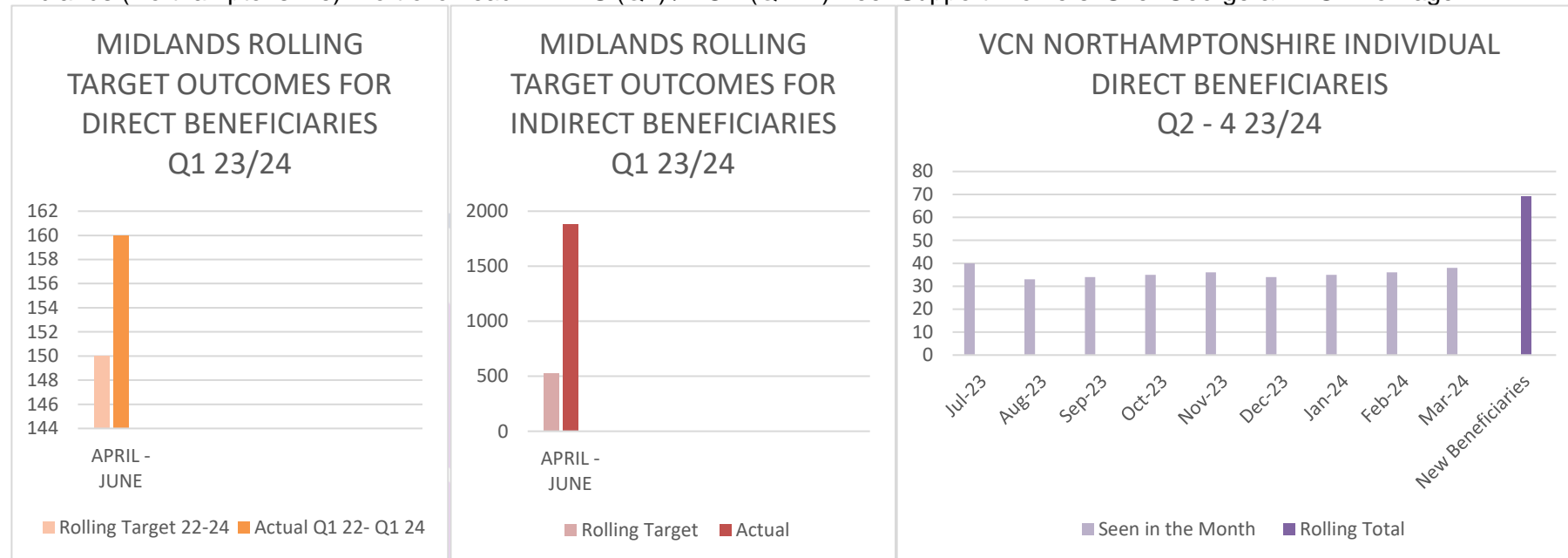
Eastern (Bedfordshire). Portfolio Lead: Bridge for Heroes. Peer Support Worker: Tina Griffiths, Sher George & Dr Gill Le Page



Beneficiary Case Study Summary

During the period April 23 to March 24, I worked closely with a number of elderly Veterans on a one- to-one basis. By visiting all the Veterans I work with regularly it has enabled me to get to know them well and therefore to be able to spot any day-to-day issues as they arise and to provide the necessary support to ensure any potential problems are dealt with and resolved on their behalf. In addition, my visits ensure the Veterans I work with do not feel neglected or isolated. Over the year, I assisted in various ways: arranging for a smart meter to be installed, arranging replacement of a faulty personal pendant, taking a Veteran out to buy a replacement mobile phone when his old one stopped working leaving him vulnerable, phoning a GP to arrange for a nutritionist to visit a Veteran who I'd noticed was losing weight and was not eating properly.

Midlands (Northamptonshire). Portfolio Lead: DMWS (Q1) / VCN (Q2- 4) Peer Support Workers: Sher George & Dr Gill Le Page



Beneficiary Case Study

JB army veteran, aged 53 yrs, PTSD service related. Alcohol dependent. JB was referred to me by Op Courage. This was the first time the veteran had reached out for support. JB had been unlawfully evicted, had very serious physical health problems relating to his dependent alcohol use resulting in a hospital admission. I worked in partnership with his local GP, local Drug and Alcohol service and Op Courage to secure a placement at Tom Harrison House. He has been abstinent for 7 months, completed a peer mentor course and plans to re-settle in Liverpool.

My role was pivotal in getting things moving locally (boots in the ground) and making sure the beneficiary remained engaged. This included transporting to appointments to make sure he got there and advocacy with housing to ensure suitable accommodation was secured.

Aspirational Eastern Region

My name is Tina Griffiths and I have been working part time for VCN for 3½ years. My role is Social Activities Coordinator and Engagement Veteran Engagement Lead covering Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes. During the period April 23 to March 24, I worked closely with a number of elderly Veterans on a one-to-one basis. By visiting all the Veterans I work with regularly it has enabled me to get to know them well and therefore to be able to spot any day-to-day issues as they arise and to provide the necessary support to ensure any potential problems are dealt with and resolved on their behalf.

In my other role as Social Activities Coordinator, I am responsible for running a weekly Tea & Banter meeting held via Zoom on Tuesday afternoons to provide social interaction for Veterans who seldom get out. During this period I continued to work in partnership with The Company of Makers holding monthly photography workshops at my Tea & Banter meetings with themes including Reflections, Buildings, and Water. I also organised presentations by Bedfordshire Police on Cyber Protection and Bedford Fire Service on Fire Safety in the Home, as well as a couple of Musical presentations including Music from WW1 in November 2023 to coincide with Armistice Day and a Musical Tour of Ireland to coincide with St Patrick's Day in March 2024. Both the monthly Brunch and Drop-in sessions continue to thrive

In October 2023, VCN had a stand at the Ageing Well Exhibition at the Bedford Corn Exchange which gave me the opportunity to meet lots of other organisations and make some useful contacts including Home Instead who agreed to come to the VCN Veterans Christmas Party at the North End Club where they gave out a wrapped gift to each and every Veteran who attended.

Sadly One of the Veterans I have been visiting over the last 3 years passed away in December 2023 and as he had no immediate family, I liaised with a distant relative who he had not had contact with for many years and who did not live locally, to provide information about the Veteran's finances, utility suppliers, etc. so they could sort out his affairs, and made arrangements for his cat to be collected and rehomed, I also offered assistance with his funeral , and gave the eulogy.

Inspirational South East Region

I am Paul Dunkley, and I currently work for Veterans Community Network (VCN) as a Veterans Peer Support Worker covering the Buckinghamshire (South Eastern) area. My region includes Milton Keynes, Newport Pagnell, Aylesbury, and High Wycombe. I have worked in this rewarding role since April 2022.

I am a former Royal Marine Commando, who served for 22 years for Queen and country. I work closely with tri-service veterans, with any cap badge and from all ranks. I treat everyone equally, fairly and with complete respect. I resolutely support my veterans, my reservists, and their families, which is what the VCN organisation actively promotes.

I currently have ten active regular service users who all require different levels of support, advocacy, guidance, and information. I assist these veterans with either their mental health issues, physical health issues, substance misuse problems, employment dilemmas, and lack of social skills interactions.

I oversee two monthly social events regularly, where veterans can attend and openly interact with one another with no judgement or pressure. One event is the VCN Blue Light Hub Drop-in held at the Fire Station in West Ashland, Milton Keynes. The other event is the VCN Veterans Get Together held at Rivets Sports and Social Club in Aylesbury; both these events are consistently well attended and the veterans who participate are provided with free refreshments as well as good military banter and polite camaraderie.

I have worked in impressive partnership with the following organisations: Veterans Outreach Support (VOS), National Health Service (NHS), Bucks Fire & Rescue Service (BFRS), Royal British Legion (RBL), Soldiers' Sailors' Airmen's Families Association (SSAFA), Op Courage, Addiction Recovery Community Milton Keynes (ARC MK), and Blind Veterans UK.

I have acquired worthwhile advice, information, and guidance from the following organisations: The Royal Marines Charity (TRMC), British Limbless Ex-Servicemen's Association (BLESMA), Veterans UK, Walking with the Wounded (WWTW) and the Defence Medical Welfare Service (DMWS) in support of my veteran.

Motivations Midlands Region

I am Sher George, and I work as a Peer Mentor with the Veterans Community Network, covering Northamptonshire & Bedfordshire.

My role consists of guiding and helping our clients with various problems that might include a multitude of issues whether it be housing, benefits, mental health (including drug & alcohol use) and socialising whilst supporting each Veteran to gain access into the right treatment at the right time.

I have a good relationship with the many organisations that we work with ultimately working towards a positive outcome for our Service Users.

Socialising can be a something Veterans refrain from due to their, sometimes complex, mental health but with gentle coaxing and support we have testimony from many who have found encouragement and friendship in attending the various activities that VCN offers. The 'Breakfast Club' at the Och n' Dough in Wellingborough has gone from strength to strength, and we can have up to 30 veterans attend. Our 'Drop In Hub' is for Veterans who wish to seek advice on a plethora of issues including pensions, benefits etc and the DWP Armed Forces Champion regularly attends. If we don't have an answer to the problem at that time, we make sure we contact someone who does and will advise accordingly. To add, many just come for the social side and enjoy good company with a cuppa.

As a Peer Mentor you see first-hand the impact as to what mental & physical health, from time in service, can have on an individual. Some are not in a good place, but we are totally dedicated to supporting each Veteran into a life that is worth living for. I am excited for the future of VCN and what it continues do for the women and men who have served their country.

Financial review, Accounts and Independent Examiner's Report at 31 March 2024

Unrestricted Funds and Policy on Reserves

At the year end the Charity had accumulated Unrestricted Funds amounting to £14,165.00, which is less than the previous year-end.

During the year, one contract was terminated early for reasons beyond the control of the Charity. The Board of Trustees took the decision to honour the employment contract of the staff member and to continue providing the services for the full term. The unfunded cost was borne by the Unrestricted Funds.

This is in alignment with the Charity's Reserves Policy, where the main purpose of retaining reserves is to fund shortfalls in income i.e. income does not reach financially forecasted levels as expected, in the case, the unexpected early termination of a contract. As a Charity, the Board of Trustees decided that it was in our beneficiaries' best interest to action what is outlined within our Reserves Policy and utilise the Unrestricted Reserves for salary and contract costs to enable the continuity of staff employment to provide the continuation of our services. A designated portion of the Unrestricted Reserves was also used for the on-going operational costs of the Charity.


Restricted Funds and Principal Source of Funding

The Charity's principal source of funding is grant income from support providers for the provision of social prescribing and peer mentoring services. The grant income is usually earned under fixed term contracts. At the end of the period end restricted funds amounted to £4,519.00 representing the balance of funds remaining on unexpired contracts.

Declaration

The trustees declare that they have approved the Trustees' Annual Report above.

Signed on behalf of the Charity's Trustees.

Signature	
Trustee Name	Pat Haslam
Position	Chair of Trustees

Date: 31 January 2025

Veterans Community Network	1191970
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CC16a



CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Receipts and payments accounts

For the period from	01/04/2023	To	31/03/2024
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Section A Receipts and payments

	Unrestricted funds to the nearest £	Restricted funds to the nearest £	Endowment funds to the nearest £	Total funds to the nearest £	Last year to the nearest £
A1 Receipts					
Grant Income	-	88,944	-	88,944	97,640
Training Course Income	-	-	-	-	-
Donations	16,267	-	-	16,267	4,158
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total (Gross income for AR)	16,267	88,944	-	105,212	101,798
A2 Asset and investment sales, (see table).					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-

Total receipts

16,267

88,944

-

105,212

101,798

A3 Payments

Cost of Goods Sold	-	11,373	-	11,373	3,698
Direct Expenses	-	86	-	86	694
Direct Wages	16,944	3,240	-	20,184	20,527
Advertising & Marketing	110	-	-	110	1,363
Audit & Accountancy fees	825	-	-	825	750
General Expenses	376	1,919	-	2,296	673
Insurance	-	-	-	-	725
Telephone, IT Software and Consumables	1,025	1,234	-	2,259	168
Postage, Freight & Courier	54	-	-	54	32
Rent	660	-	-	660	60
Repairs & Maintenance	-	-	-	-	273
Return of Grant	-	-	-	-	8,123
Salaries, Ni & Pension	-	64,310	-	64,310	63,656
Staff Training	75	-	-	75	180
Subscriptions	426	327	-	753	842
Motor and Travel	672	8,310	-	8,982	8,168
Sub total	21,168	90,799	-	111,967	109,932

A4 Asset and investment purchases, (see table)

-	-	-	-	
---	---	---	---	--

	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total payments	21,168	90,799	-	111,967	109,932
Net of receipts/(payments)	(4,901)	(1,855)	-	(6,755)	(8,134)
A5 Transfers between funds			-	-	-
A6 Cash funds last year end	19,066	6,374	-	25,440	33,573
Cash funds this year end	14,165	4,519	-	18,685	25,439

Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B1 Cash funds	Cash at Bank	14,165	4,519	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
	Total cash funds	14,165	4,519	-
	(agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))	OK	OK	OK
		Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Endowment funds
	Details	to nearest £	to nearest £	to nearest £

B2 Other monetary assets

	-	-	-
	-	-	-
	-	-	-
	-	-	-
	-	-	-
	-	-	-
	-	-	-

B3 Investment assets

Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
		-	-
		-	-
		-	-
		-	-
		-	-
		-	-

B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use

Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
		-	-
		-	-
		-	-
		-	-
		-	-
		-	-
		-	-
		-	-
		-	-

		-	-
--	--	---	---

B5 Liabilities

Details	Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	When due (optional)
PAYE Creditor	Restricted Funds	1,105	
Pension Creditor	Restricted Funds	324	
Aged Payables	Restricted Funds	87	
Aged Payables	Unrestricted Funds	2,876	
		-	

Signed by one trustee on behalf of all the trustees

Signature



Print Name

Pat Haslam

Date of approval

31/01/2025



CHARITY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Independent examiner's report on the accounts

Section A

Independent Examiner's Report

Report to the trustees/ members of

Charity Name
Veterans Community Network

On accounts for the year ended

31 March 2024

Charity no
(if any)

1191970

Set out on pages

1 to 25

Responsibilities and basis of report

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended 31/03/2024.

As the charity trustees of the Trust, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent examiner's statement


I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention (other than that disclosed below *) in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Act or
- the accounts do not accord with the accounting records

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

* Please delete the words in the brackets if they do not apply.

Signed:



Date:

31/01/2025

Name:

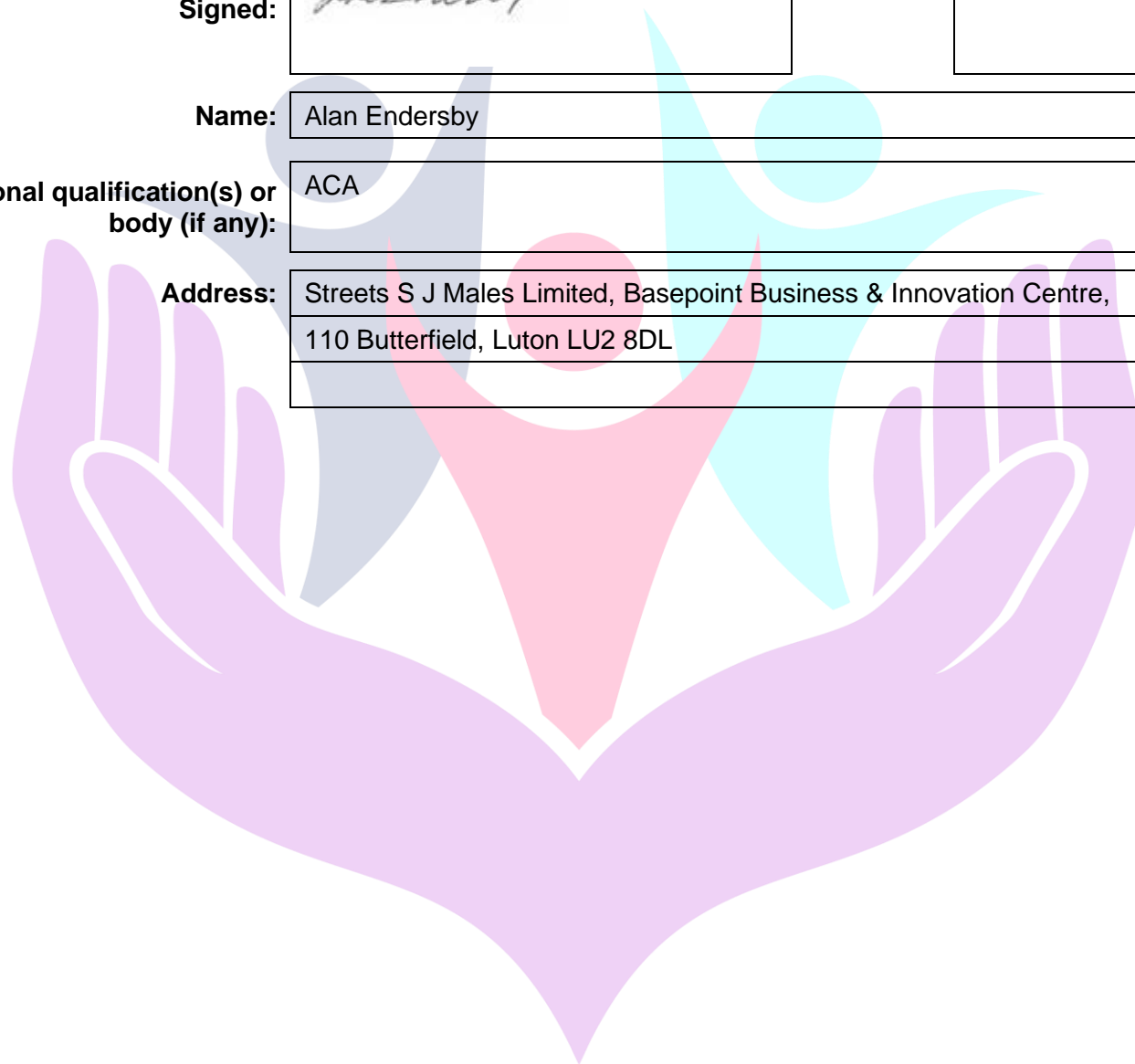
Alan Endersby

**Relevant professional qualification(s) or
body (if any):**

ACA

Address:

Streets S J Males Limited, Basepoint Business & Innovation Centre,
110 Butterfield, Luton LU2 8DL



Only complete if the examiner needs to highlight matters of concern (see CC32, Independent examination of charity accounts: directions and guidance for examiners).

Give here brief details of any items that the examiner wishes to disclose.

None.