

VIC Newsletter

Happy New Year

THE New Year is going to be an exciting time for VIC.

Chief Executive Amanda Walton said: "Over the last 12 months we have had an unprecedented rise in demand for our services that has stretched our staff and volunteers to capacity.

"Additionally, we saw the retirement of our Operations Manager and founder Bob Elliott, however it was exciting to welcome him back as a Board Member, Trustee and critical friend.

"We were also delighted to welcome Phil Speddy as our new Operations Manager from May and he has settled superbly into the role.

"VIC is very excited about 2026. We have plans to reshape the charity and we are working with Pilotlight which will help our organisation to build its resilience and capacity and personally, I am really excited about the opportunity."

VIC was one of the charities chosen to receive a package of support from The Weston Charity Awards.

A team from mentoring and



coaching service Pilotlight attended the VIC Centre this month and met with Trustees, staff, volunteers and VIC members.

Chief Executive Amanda Walton and Chair of Trustees Ronnie Barker, pictured above with Clare Gough, Director of the Garfield Western Foundation, that administers the award, will be going to London to have a further meeting with the Pilotlight in February.

Amanda said: "We are moving on to the 'where do we want to go?' stage."

The aim is to jointly construct a mechanism so that, in future, VIC will become less reliant on grant funding and more socially sustainable.



Three year funding

A HUGE thank you to the Veterans' Foundation which has generously agreed to support the work of VIC with a grant of £75,000 for three years.

Chief Executive Amanda Walton said: "We are very grateful as salaries and National Insurance costs keep rising year-on-year.

"This grant offers VIC some resilience towards the soaring

costs of providing staff to support our beneficiaries and we are very grateful to the charity."

VIC was visited by Clare Graham, the Grants' Manager from the Veterans' Foundation.

Amanda said: "It was quite refreshing to have a funder come and see what we have to offer and it was a wonderful opportunity to be able to bring VIC to life and show just what we do."



VIC is thrilled to be working with Haslingden company Deni-Deni who have created a beautiful leather poppy key fob which is on sale at the VIC Centre in Haslingden. This is a new partnership and VIC hopes to be working closely with the local company in the future.

Join the Bob Ross class

THIS is one of the stunning paintings created at the latest painting in the style of Bob Ross class held at VIC.

Volunteer Arts and Crafts Co-ordinator Darren Horsnell leads the classes and the next one will be on Sunday February 22 from 10.30am to 3.30pm.

The cost is £45 which includes canvas and all materials needed. Refreshments are provided but please bring your own lunch.

To book a place, contact Administrator Amy Thompson and pay a non-refundable deposit of £15.



MP debates Northern Ireland and Troubles Bill with veterans

HYNDBURN and Haslingden MP Sarah Smith visited the VIC Centre in Haslingden to have a candid conversation with veterans.

She heard first-hand the thoughts, feelings and concerns of veterans about the ongoing debates around the legacy issues in Northern Ireland and The Troubles Bill.

After the visit, she wrote to the charity to thank everyone for welcoming her to the centre.

She writes: "It was a privilege to listen to your experiences and to hear, with

complete honesty and calm, how the ongoing debates around the legacy issues in Northern Ireland continue to affect you.

"Your service, and the dignity with which you carry the memories of those years, made a deep impression on me.

"Several of you spoke about the feeling that old wounds may be reopened and that veterans, including those who served in specialist units such as the SAS, may be unfairly targeted. I want you to know that I took those concerns away with me and that they will very much be in my mind



throughout the proceedings of the Northern Ireland Troubles Bill."

Chief Executive Amanda Walton said: "She didn't just listen to the veterans, she also reported their concerns back and she did not shy away from the subject at all. Our veterans felt like they had been heard."

Any veteran who wishes to raise further points can contact sarah.smith.mp@parliament.uk

Teamwork

WORKING with Myshon Housing, VIC delivered its fastest route to safe accommodation securing a same-day solution for a veteran.

Operations Manager Phil Speddy said: "On presentation of a homeless veteran in crisis we were able to house them in 10 hours.

"That is a testament to the relationship Project Worker Ray Sharkey has built up with Myshon Housing, and to VIC's ethos around the value of strong partnerships that ensure best possible outcomes for veterans."

Regiment on parade

TO MARK the 20th anniversary of the formation of the Duke of Lancaster Regiment an anniversary parade will be held in Preston City Centre on Saturday July 4 and regimental family event will be hosted by Fulwood Barracks.

Warm grant

THANKS to a grant from Lancashire County Council's Warm Spaces Scheme, VIC was able to provide a free warm place for people to meet over the colder winter months.

The scheme, initially started in libraries, has been extended to include community organisations to create or enhance their own Warm Space offer over winter. There is a video about the scheme on our Facebook page.

VIC merchansise

A SELECTION of VIC logoed merchandise is available at the VIC Centre in Haslingden.

The new clothing includes shell jackets at £40, hoodies £25, polo shirts £15 and there is a limited supply of beanies at £7.50.



Hampers of cheer

AN ARMY was involved in sorting, packing and delivering hampers across Rossendale, Hyndburn, Burnley and Ribble Valley.

Project Worker Ray Sharkey said: "I would like to say thank you to everyone who donated items to go in the hampers. Along with food we had Christmas treats and special present

boxes for families.

"Thank you to everyone who helped to sort all the donations and box up the hampers."

Seventy six hampers were packaged and delivered by Philip Keogh and his daughter, Paul and Sam Kelly, Kev Pritchard, Bob the dog, Phil Chamberlain, Aaron Lorimar, Catherine Smyth, Carol Duckworth.



Bury Art shop

OUR pop-up art shop in Bury closed in January – but it was a huge success selling locally made veterans' art to people from all over the UK and even America.

The timing of the shop offer, in a prominent place at Mill Gate Shopping Centre, could not have been better as we were able to fit out the premises and open in time for Remembrance and also the Christmas trade.

Chief Executive Amanda Walton said: "It has exceeded any expectations we had when we first approached the Mill Gate as to whether we could have a vacant unit for a short time to exhibit, display and sell artwork and many items produced through laser engraving, sublimation and 3D models.

"Since the first day, the response from the public, veterans, their families, and those who have bought items from us, has been amazing."

She praised Volunteer Arts and Crafts Co-ordinator Darren Horsnell and Outreach Worker Steve Butterworth for their dedication and work and described the shop as a 'phenomenal success'.

With the location near B and M and enroute to the market, it promoted the work of VIC and some of our partners to a wider audience.

One of the volunteers was Wilma McCarrick from The Crown Veterans' Breakfast Club. Before the shop opened, the club had around 20 people for Friday breakfast, in late January they had 36.

As a thank you Wilma was presented

with a sublimated clock with a photo of her husband behind the clock hands, while the Mill Gate Centre Manager Kelly Townend was presented with an engraved slate clock.

Several other volunteers were also presented with gifts including Peter Schinzel, Graham Limb, Sam Kelly and Jacko Pearce.

The volunteers who worked on the days the shop opened thoroughly enjoyed it, especially the conversations with people who called in.

Amanda said: "It was really good for new members of our art group to have their work exhibited and when one found out her piece had been sold she burst into tears."

Paintings and prints, along with various other items, were sold to people from Bury and surrounding areas and also the North-East, South-West, Cumbria and even Carolina in the USA.

The plan is to hold another pop-up shop with an even wider range of items for sale, for more information please contact Amy Thompson, Darren or Steve on 01706 833180.

A very big thank you



to everyone who bought something from VIC or made a donation, the money from the sales go into making the Art project more sustain-

able.

Equally important is a thank you to the team of 10 who quickly and methodically cleared the shop of items and also

VIC-FIT project

VETERANS will be helping each other to get healthy in a partnership between VIC, Rossendale Borough Council and Rossendale Leisure Trust.

A grant of £925 has been awarded by the council to VIC and the pilot scheme involves free use of the Leisure Trust facilities.

Operations Manager Phil Speddy said: "VIC-FIT will bridge accessibility issues by offering local veterans structured access to RLT gyms, swimming, and classes, alongside tailored support from VIC staff and volunteers."

A Gym Buddy Scheme means veterans will be accompanied by volunteers to help them feel comfortable in the gym environment.

Group introductions and peer sessions will see confidence-building activities that encourage veterans to exercise together, and form supportive networks, an holistic wellbeing approach will tackle physical and mental health, and support those with conditions such as PTSD, anxiety, obesity, and those with, or at risk of, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

VIC-FIT will begin with a small pilot group in Rossendale. Proven results could hopefully secure further funding to expand the project.



VIC Highlights 2025

Here are some of the main highlights of our activities and news from 2025

All our other news for 2025 can also be viewed in the Newsletters and News Stories on our website www.veteransincommunities.org/news.html

None of this happens without our members, volunteers, supporters and partners.

VIC exists for ex-service personnel, blue light veterans, their families and our communities.

It offers connection, peer support, practical guidance and, most importantly, places and spaces where people can belong.

THE VIC CENTRE

All year, the VIC Centre has continued to be a welcoming space whether that's for a brew, a chat, advice, or getting involved in activities, one of our groups, or just because... you don't need a reason.

We've also continued working alongside partner organisations who support our members through specialist services and often within our centre, so people can access help in one place. This includes:

- Housing
- Benefits
- Pensions
- Employment
- Advocacy
- Signposting
- Referrals
- Wellbeing
- Befriending
- Companionship
- Inclusion
- Volunteering
- Activities
- Outreach
- Transport
- Training
- Safeguarding
- Crisis-support

Warmth
Food
Accessibility

OUTREACH SUPPORT

Support doesn't stop at the centre. Throughout 2025 we continued outreach sessions across our communities including Middleton, Rochdale, Burnley, Accrington, Clitheroe and Preston so veterans and families can access support closer to home, and so we can reach those who find it harder to travel.



PRACTICAL HELP, GUIDANCE AND SIGNPOSTING

A big part of what we do is simply being there when someone needs support whether that's navigating services, being signposted to the right organisation, or helping someone take the next step.

This year has continued to show how important trusted, local support really is.

CONNECTION AND WELLBEING THROUGH GROUPS AND ACTIVITIES

Regular groups and sessions include:

- Drop-in at the VIC Centre including social connection and advice.
- Arts & Crafts Group;
- Bob Ross-style painting sessions and themed creative classes.
- Model Railway Club, build projects, layouts, shared sessions.
- Veterans in Production, making and building projects.
- VIC Choir, whose performances are also used for community fundraising.
- Walking group / social walks.
- Social inclusion trips / days out – member outings;
- Outreach groups, drop-in and community sessions across: Middleton, Rochdale, Burnley, Accrington, Clitheroe and Preston Sandbag Cafe.



WELLBEING, SKILLS AND MEMBER EXPERIENCE ACTIVITIES

- Woodland Xperiences – Outdoor team-building days.
- Mission Motorsport – Motorsports & karting days.
- Adventure Neighbourhood – Pioneering Equine Scentwork.
- Carp Fishing Weekends.
- Partner-led sessions at or through VIC and specialist support delivered alongside VIC provision.



MAJOR COMMUNITY EVENTS

- Armed Forces Week flag-raising events.
- Armed Forces family fun day at the VIC Centre.
- Remembrance and commemorative activities.

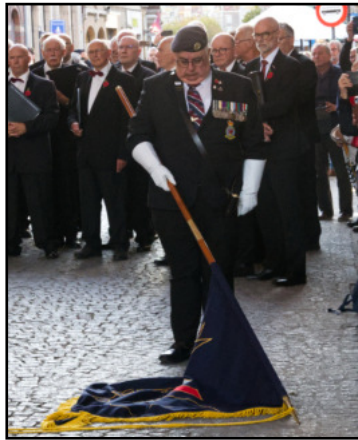


LOCAL COMMEMORATIONS AND REMEMBRANCE

- VE Day 80 ceremonial lighting of beacon at Lancaster Castle.
- VE Day 80 parade and service at Blackburn Cathedral.
- VIC's VE Day Breakfast.
- VJ Day remembrance, events and services.
- Rossendale Walk of Remembrance.



VIC Highlights 2025



- First and Second World War Battlefields Tour of France and Belgium.
- Menin Gate Last Post Ceremony.
- Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall, London.
- Burnley FC Remembrance on the pitch and in the parade.



ENTERPRISE AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY

- Mill Gate, Bury, pop-up art shop – volunteer-led, showcasing VIC members' artwork and veteran-made items.
- Seasonal one-off social activities.
- VE Day 80 breakfast-style event.
- Wreath-making workshop,

- Christmas meals, quizzes and seasonal outreach socials.
- Christmas hamper activity and annual festive support work.
- Fundraising, donations and community support.

We've been overwhelmed by the kindness shown to VIC during 2025. Some highlights include:

FUNDRAISING TOTALS FROM EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

- Riding for Forces & Families – London to Haslingden: £1,879.20
- VIC Choir performances: £1,818.
- Rossendale Walk of Remembrance: £688.85
- Tesco Clitheroe Christmas stall: £502.20
- City Electrical Factors charity darts: £218.32
- Remembrance blanket raffle total: £350



DONATIONS, MATCHED GIVING AND GRANTS

- Ring of Red donation: £5,000.
- Wardle 'Flag 5' donation including matched: £1,000.
- Hoghton Players donation: £900.
- Lancashire County Council

Warm Space Grant: £750.

- ASDA Foundation grant: £600.
- Throttle Twisters MCC donation: £267.

Every single donation, raffle ticket, stall, and fundraising mile makes a difference. Thank you to each and every one of you.

We also received the following grants in 2025:

- Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust – £29,142.60
- Co-op Community Fund – £2,181.38
- Arnold Clark – £1,000
- Rossendale Borough Council Mayor's donation – £1,000
- Lancashire County Council VE Day Celebrations – £550



VOLUNTEERS - THE HEARTBEAT OF VIC

From events, groups and outreach... to the shop, admin, fundraising and simply being there for others – VIC volunteers make this community what it is.

To everyone who gave time in 2025: thank you.

There are way more people than we can name, but you know who you are.

CHRISTMAS SUPPORT

Towards the end of the year, we were able to provide significant festive support, including around 70 food hampers each year, strengthened by community donations and grants.

2025 SUMMARY

- Jan: Service overview; 800+ membership with around 500 monthly drop-ins. Planning and programme activity continued.
- Feb: Memorial creative activity; accessibility support; outreach venue development.
- March: Community recognition and engagement; ongoing group delivery.
- April: Community fundraising and engagement; mobilisation for summer.
- May: Operations leadership transition; continued events and member opportunities.
- June: Armed Forces Week activity; centre improvements; partner engagement.
- July: Riding for Forces & Families delivered; summer community events.
- Aug: Community commemorations and events; fundraising totals confirmed; inclusion activity continued.
- Sept: AGM reporting; Battlefields Tour; pop-up shop planning; school engagement.
- Oct: Mental health training; remembrance mobilisation; fundraising activity.
- Nov: Pop-up shop launched; Walk of Remembrance; trips and inclusion activity.

What's On and Where



ROSSENDALE

Activities at the VIC Centre, Bury Road, Haslingden, BB4 5PL, unless otherwise stated.

Outreach Service

MONDAY-FRIDAY

9am-4.30pm

For a home appointment call 01706 833180

MONDAY

Crafty Chatters

10am-12 noon

TUESDAY

Art Group

10am-3.30pm

Cost £6 places limited book on

01706 833180

WEDNESDAY

Allotment

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

THURSDAY

Greggs RV

1pm-3pm

THURSDAY

VIC Choir (weekly)

6.30-8.30pm

FRIDAY

Art Group

10am-3.30pm

Cost £6 places limited book on

01706 833180

SUNDAY

Drop-in

10.15am-12.30pm

SECOND SATURDAY IN THE MONTH

Rossendale Armed Forces and Veterans' Breakfast Club

10am-12.30pm

Haslingden Community Link Cafe, Bury Road, Haslingden BB4 5PG (book in advance)

EVERY MONTH

Painting in the Style of Bob Ross art classes

Contact Darren 01706 833180

Walking Groups/ Social Inclusion trips

see Facebook or website for details

Parson Lane, Clitheroe, BB7 2JY.

Sandbag Cafe

10am-12.30pm

St George's Church, off Lune Street, Preston PR1 2NP. This is a joint session with Lancashire Armed Forces Association.

BURNLEY AND PENDLE

Outreach Service

MONDAY

10am-noon

Breakfast Club at Burnley Miners' Social Club, Plumbe Street, Burnley, BB11 3AA.

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

HEYWOOD, MIDDLETON AND ROCHDALE

VIC Outreach

TUESDAY

The Mess Tin - cafe and drop-in

1pm-2.30pm

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

THURSDAY

Rochdale Veterans' Breakfast Club and VIC Outreach

9am Flying Horse Hotel, Packer Street, Rochdale, OL16 1NJ.

HYNDBURN

Outreach / Drop-In/ Model Railway Club/ Art Group

FRIDAY 10am-3pm

VIC Hyndburn, Accrington Arndale Centre, BB5 1EX.

Accrington Stanley Breakfast Club/ Drop-In LAST SATURDAY EVERY MONTH

10.30am-noon

Stanley Sports Hub, Thorneyholme Road, Accrington, BB5 6BD.

BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN

Veterans' football

MONDAY 8-9pm

Blackburn Rovers Indoor Centre, Ewood Park, Blackburn BB2 4JF. A cost applies.

Outreach Service

TUESDAY 10am-noon

Rovers Breakfast Hub, Legends Lounge, Darwen End, Blackburn Rovers FC, Ewood Park, Blackburn, BB2 4JF.

Contact Chris McGrail 07787 585109

RIBBLE VALLEY & PRESTON

TUESDAYS

Redoubt Coffee Morning and Outreach

10am-noon

Trinity Methodist Church, Wesleyan Row,

VIC – 01706 833180

Chief Executive Amanda Walton

amandawalton@vic.org.uk

Operations Manager Phil Speddy

philspeddy@vic.org.uk

Administrator Amy Thompson

amythompson@vic.org.uk

Outreach Worker Steve Butterworth

stevebutterworth@vic.org.uk

Project Worker Ray Sharkey

raysharkey@vic.org.uk 07741 902 188

Community Capacity Builder

John Pluckwell

johnpluckwell@vic.org.uk

Arts and Crafts Co-ordinator

Darren Horsnell

darrenhorsnell@vic.org.uk

VIC Choir Bookings Barry Hyde

b.hyde@ntlworld.com

Veterans at risk of homelessness

or organisations working with them are

encouraged to contact OP FORTITUDE

0800 952 0774 or visit riv.org.uk/opfortitude

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@ssafa.org.uk

01772 260 462

Citizens Advice East Lancashire

0808 278 7975 freephone Mon-Fri 9am-5pm

The Samaritans

01282 694929

Mon to Fri 9am-9pm

Freephone 116 123

Op Courage

0300 373 3332 email

opcourageNORTH@cntw.nhs.uk

Veterans UK Free Helpline

0808 1914 218

East Lancashire Single Point of Access via

GP or self-referral

0800 0130 707

Armed Forces Support Group

01282 613132

Veterans In Communities
Charity Number 1151194

Want to help?

To support VIC
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