



### Veterans' Lives Inspire Book

A new book celebrating the incredible life stories of veterans living at The Royal Star & Garter Homes, Surbiton has just been released. Entitled 'Poems by Post', the book contains letters, photos and biographies of residents, plus poems inspired by residents' lives, written by local poets. The book's official launch was held at the Surbiton Home, where residents, relatives, staff and volunteers gathered together to hear a selection of poems read by the book's authors and members of staff.

The book was compiled by It's Not Your Birthday But (INYBB), a project that aims to unite communities and encourage people to enjoy communication via the written letter. As part of the project, INYBB ran a penpal initiative where 12-year-old pupils from Hinchley Wood School began exchanging letters with residents. It proved to be very successful, with many residents and pupils discovering they had a great deal in common. The correspondence was then gathered and excerpts featured in the book.



*Wendy Smithers, Director of INYBB, reads a poem for residents*

Tom Mallender, Lead Artist for Poems by Post, visited residents to chat about their lives. Tom recorded the residents' stories and posted them to local writers, who in return composed poems inspired by the veterans. Over the course of his visits, Tom got to know each resident well and even found out stories that family members hadn't heard before. Tom remarked, *"It has been a genuine honour and privilege to work on the this project, every resident had something to teach me and offered inspiration on everything from how to live, to love, and how to look at the world and the responsibility we all have to the rest of society."*



*Pauline with her mother Betty, who was in the WAAF during the Second World War*

A poem inspired by resident Betty's service in the WAAF was read out by her daughter, Pauline. After the event, Pauline explained the admiration Betty's family have for her military past, *"It's very easy for Mum to think what she did was nothing special, but we all think it was amazing. All of her family are very proud of her."*



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Speaking after the book launch, Wendy Smithers, founding director of INYBB commented, *"It was a real privilege to launch 'Poems by Post' in the midst of the very people whose amazing stories and experiences had inspired the book and the poems within it. Sharing the memories of these inspiring lives through poetry was more powerful than I had anticipated and they are now preserved forever in our book, which belongs to all the residents who took part."*

**Ends**

### **Notes for editors:**

It's Not Your Birthday But initiative strives to get more people writing, reading and sending letters and postcards. [www.itsnotyourbirthdaybut.com](http://www.itsnotyourbirthdaybut.com)

Find out more about Tom Mallender's project at Write-London.com

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### **About The Royal Star & Garter Homes:**

**The Charity provides award-winning care for veterans and their partners who live with disability or dementia.**

The Royal Star & Garter Homes is a charity founded in 1916 to care for the severely injured young men returning from the battlegrounds of the First World War. Today we provide specialist care to the whole military family in our friendly, state-of-the-art Homes. Disabled ex-Servicemen and women, and their spouses, can all benefit from our pioneering approach to nursing, dementia and therapeutic care.

We are in the process of building new Homes around the country to provide specialist nursing care for disabled ex-Service people in the best modern surroundings, including dementia care facilities to address this growing need. The Charity has award-winning Homes in Solihull, West Midlands, and Surbiton, Surrey, which also enables the Charity to offer interim care for

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young disabled Service personnel. Following the successes of the first two Homes, a third Home in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, is being built, with a planned opening in 2018.

We are proud to have enjoyed Royal patronage since our foundation, including that of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II from 1953 to the present day.

The Charity celebrated its centenary in 2016: providing specialist care for disabled veterans since 1916.

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