



**Royal Star  
& Garter**

Care with courage

# Spring Connections Newsletter

2024





# Royal Star & Garter

Care with courage

## About us

We provide loving, compassionate care to veterans and their partners living with disability or dementia.

Our Homes in Solihull, Surbiton and High Wycombe offer outstanding residential care.

We have launched new services reaching out into the community, including Day Care, Lunch Clubs and a Telephone Friendship Service.



# Welcome to Connections...



...and to our new look! This compact size helps us to send Connections out more economically while still sharing the same engaging stories. Your newsletter will now be sent out three times a year to keep you better informed. We hope you enjoy reading it.

As well as caring for our residents, your support enables us to reach veterans in the community, with Day Care, Lunch Clubs and a free Telephone Friendship Service. You can read more about Day Care on page 7.

Did you know that we run three photoshoots a year in our Homes to capture the amazing images you see? Our thanks goes to everyone who agrees to be photographed so that we can share our stories with you. The people featured throughout are actual residents, relatives, staff and volunteers – even the sweetshop on the cover is real!

Best wishes,

Cally Madden, Editor



## Veteran Friendly Framework (VFF)

Designed for use in residential settings for older people, the VFF supports care providers to identify veterans and their wellbeing needs, address social isolation and signpost to statutory and charitable services.

The VFF is a two-year collaboration between ourselves, the Royal British Legion and the NHS, with funding support from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust.

There are over 25,000 veterans in England who currently live in care homes. This programme supports our aim to reach even more members of the Armed Forces community.

Professor Deborah Sturdy, the Chief Nurse for Adult Social Care in England, said: “The partnership and opportunity that the VFF presents to make sure people live well and have a fulfilled and interesting life is absolutely critical.”



With your support, we provided over

**61,000**

days of care last year

# Stories from our Homes



Homes news

## ‘Richly deserved’ award

Our Surbiton Home was once again named in the Top 20 Care Homes in the capital by carehome.co.uk, in its annual Top 20 Awards.



These are based on reviews written by our residents, their relatives and friends. There are over 1,200 care homes in London, and this marks the fourth year running that Surbiton has featured in the Top 20 Awards, reflecting the exceptional care we provide. Home Manager Helena (left) is proud of her staff.

Billy’s mother lives with dementia at our Surbiton Home. He commented on the award: “It’s great news that the Home has been listed among the Top 20 in London. It’s richly deserved and proof that they’re doing something really special. It helps me sleep at night knowing how well my mum is looked after.”

## Flying high

Resident and Iraq War veteran Stephen said he “felt he was flying” when he enjoyed an indoor skydiving experience.



The 36-year-old soldier has been unable to walk since suffering severe injuries from a mortar attack while serving in Iraq, in 2007. We teamed up with Help for Heroes and took him to iFly in Basingstoke, where he soared into the air in a wind tunnel, with the help of instructors.

Stephen said: “Since I suffered my injuries when I was 19, I haven’t been able to walk, but for a few moments, I was able to fly, and it felt incredible.”

## Caring for couples

**We're privileged to care for couples in each of our Homes. For them, and their relatives, we're providing peace of mind.**

We currently have seven married couples living with us. Vera and Eric live together in Surbiton. Vera said: "I'm so happy my Eric is here. He's living with dementia but I know he's receiving the best care. It's a huge relief for me to know he's loved and looked after by staff. I see the improvements he's making and I think that it's a miracle."

Residents Roy and Patricia (right) were neighbours and childhood sweethearts. They are now both living with dementia in our High Wycombe Home. Their son Greg is grateful that they can be cared for together. "You're not just looking after my parents, you're looking after a much wider family of people, and giving them peace of mind."

**better together**

“

**If they weren't together, I think they would both be deeply unhappy. They'd be lost without each other.**

Greg, Roy and Patricia's son



# Stories from our Homes



Homes news

## Spotlight on eating well

Our residents enjoy delicious, healthy food at every meal, and the role it plays in their wellbeing cannot be overestimated.



During Nutrition & Hydration Week, our Wellbeing Teams worked with the kitchen staff in our Homes to demonstrate the benefits of a good diet and staying hydrated.

In High Wycombe, residents took part in a taste test, sampling foods from around the world.

“

A good diet and hydration are crucial in supporting everyone's health. It is an important part of our care, and I'm happy to see events like Nutrition & Hydration Week highlighting this.

Shirley Hall, Director of Care & Wellbeing

In Solihull, everyone had a delicious time making fresh fruit kebabs and smoothies.

The Surbiton Home threw a Mad Hatter's tea party, with staff and residents dressed up as characters from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

## Day Care is back!

We are delighted to have restarted Day Care at our Solihull and High Wycombe Homes, and launched it in Surbiton. Alongside Lunch Club and our free Telephone Friendship Service, we are supporting more veterans than ever.

Day Care provides a relaxed and companionable way for veterans and their partners to spend their day, including a tasty cooked lunch. It also offers invaluable respite to their carers, who are often older people themselves.

This fun and friendly service tackles social isolation, which can be a significant issue amongst the veteran population, and promotes wellbeing by providing home-cooked food, activities and structure to the week.

Pat, a Women's Royal Army Corps veteran, attended Day Care in Solihull before Covid, and was delighted to join

## friends reunited

was good fun and I made a lot of friends. I took part in activities and the lunch was nice. I'm very glad it's back."

Shirley Hall, our new Director of Care & Wellbeing, said: "We know from feedback how important Day Care is for the people that use it, as well as the respite it brings for their carers."



# Saying goodbye

## Homes feature

**The care, love and respect we offer our residents doesn't stop when they die. As a resident leaves the Home for the last time, we ensure that they depart with dignity and love.**

With an average age of 90, our residents live with complex health needs, so a great deal of thought and attention to detail goes into their end-of-life care. When they leave the home for the last time, we offer a loving and respectful send-off. It is a continuation of the outstanding care we provide throughout their lives with us.



Detailed plans are drawn up with each resident and their family, which ranges from what music they would like to have playing, to the clothes they wish to wear. High

Wycombe Home Manager Reggie Ballos (top right) said: “We make sure final wishes are followed. We only get this chance once, so it's really important to get it right.”

Many residents choose to have the traditional Royal Star & Garter send-off. The service sees the coffin draped in the Union Flag or other national flag of their choice, with a poppy wreath laid upon it and their favourite music playing. The resident will leave the Home with the undertakers via the main entrance, followed by their relatives. Meanwhile staff and residents gather together to applaud and say a last farewell.

Helena Maher is the Home Manager at Surbiton. She said: “In other care homes,

## final salute

when someone dies, they may be taken out

by the back door so as not to upset the other residents. But death is inevitable. We see dying as part of life's journey and it's not hidden away. We celebrate the resident and their life.

“It's a family farewell. There's a sense of ceremony and camaraderie that is familiar to residents. It links to the military, and it's granting someone a huge sign of respect.”

Reggie said residents love the service. “It's comforting for them when they see the love and dignity on display.”





“

We had been asked to choose a piece of music and it was playing as everyone gathered to say farewell. It was such a lovely thing to do. There was no ‘going out by the back door’.

Resident Mike’s daughter Jackie



Often a resident will have requested that their funeral procession stops outside en route to the final service. For Reggie, it shows the high esteem the Homes and staff are held in: “It’s an honour for us. It’s recognition that this was the resident’s home, and that we are a family. Undertakers have also said they are moved by the respect and love we show.”

It is also emotional for staff. Helena said: “We work very closely with residents and build close bonds. We’re a family, so every death affects us. Afterwards, we have to put on our professional face because we have residents to support. But it can be overwhelming, and we are all human, so we have a lot of support in place for our staff.”

We are here to ensure that our residents’ wishes are respected and supported in life – and when they die.

# In memory of Fred

**At the age of just 20 and on his first major active mission in the Second World War, Fred Caldwell was dropped into enemy-occupied France as a member of the First Special Air Service (SAS) for Operation Houndsworth.**

The mission's objective was to disrupt German lines of communication and prevent the enemy from moving up to Normandy.

"We did this by means of ambush on the main convoy routes to the Front and the use of gun cotton charges and plastic explosive to blow railway lines," Fred recalled many years later.

Although Fred's war career was prolific and took him all over Europe, he spoke little of his wartime experiences, except on Remembrance Day when he recalled his fallen comrades. Fred spent seven years with the Army and always retained great affection and utmost respect for the Armed Forces.



## Post-war years

After the war, Fred enjoyed a long and happy career with the Fire Brigade in Lancashire and in Hertfordshire.

Fred and his wife June first got to know about Royal Star & Garter after the war and became regular supporters. Sadly Fred passed away in 2013 but June continues to support us with an annual donation in memory of Fred, to mark his

birthday. June told us that her life with Fred was "full of love, fun and laughter and every day was onwards and upwards!"

We are so grateful to June for her kindness and generosity. Gifts in memory help us to ensure

that veterans and their partners living with disability and dementia can get the care they so richly deserve.

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**To leave a gift in memory, please  
call: 020 8481 7676 or donate online  
[www.starandgarter.org](http://www.starandgarter.org)**

# A chat with Michael



From our residents

In this feature, we invite a resident to tell us what's on their mind. This time we talk to Surbiton resident, Michael.



Michael left school aged 15. He was called up to do his National Service in the RAF at 18, and he credits this as 'saving his days'. In later years, his dedication to the Scouts was rewarded with an MBE from The Queen.

“

**Being at Royal Star & Garter is, in my view, the very best way I can be supported as a veteran.**

Michael, RAF

## **What advice would you give your younger self?**

Be the best you can. I think I've always tried to be the best I can.



## **How could veterans today be better supported?**

Being treated with respect, and care for their welfare. I think that's the least we can do, when you consider the sacrifices they have made for us. I think disabled veterans in particular need care and support.

## **If you could change one thing, what would it be?**

Respect for other people's point of view. I think that is a problem, especially right now. Politics today is divisive.

## **What are you most proud of?**

Being at Windsor Castle to receive the MBE from HM Queen Elizabeth. That was for services to Scouting.

## **What's one cherished moment with your family?**

The birth of my nephews and great-nephews. I still remember those moments vividly, and fondly. We are still a very close family.

## **What matters to you?**

Respect and fairness for all. I think everyone should be treated fairly. It's wrong to pre-judge anyone. I hate racism. Everyone should be treated equally and with respect.

# Community news

Charity events



## Birmingham International Tattoo

**Residents from our Solihull Home were guests of honour at February's Birmingham International Tattoo.**

We have been one of the official charities of the event since 2007. A total of £10,300 was raised, through bucket collections, programme sales and contactless payments, run by a group of volunteers. It brings the total raised for us by the Birmingham International Tattoo to over £136,000. We are deeply grateful to the organisers and volunteers for their support.

**Our friendly Supporter Care Team is always on hand to help.**

**020 8481 7674**


Monday to Friday 8.30am-4pm

[www.starandgarter.org/contact-us](http://www.starandgarter.org/contact-us)  
[supportercare@starandgarter.org](mailto:supportercare@starandgarter.org)

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