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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Volunteers' Week: The Navy veteran who's giving something back to the Armed Forces community after leg amputation

A Navy veteran who had his leg amputated during the Covid pandemic says the support he received from charities has inspired him to help others.

Paul O'Byrne is now a volunteer phone buddy with the Telephone Friendship Service, which tackles loneliness and isolation, and is run by veterans' charity Royal Star & Garter.

The 64-year-old was speaking during Volunteers' Week, which is running from 2-8 June.



Paul, today (left), and while serving in the Navy

The free-to-use Telephone Friendship Service provides regular phone calls to veterans and their partners, and was set up to help tackle loneliness and isolation in the Armed Forces community. Paul is among a number of trained volunteers who offer friendly conversation and wellbeing support, acting as a lifeline for those who may have limited social interaction.

He has been a phone buddy since September 2024, and currently speaks regularly to six people – four Army veterans, one Navy veteran and a widow whose husband was a resident at Royal Star & Garter.

Paul was born in Dublin and came to the UK in 1976, joining the Navy and serving for 24 years until 2000, when he left having attained the rank of Chief Petty Officer.

He said: "Life was great. And then all of a sudden I was told in 2021 that I was going to have my left leg amputated. It was a very difficult time for me."

Thankfully, Paul received support from charities such as Royal British Legion and Blesma, which help veterans that are amputees. When he saw an advert for Telephone Friendship Service volunteers, he was immediately interested. "I'm doing it



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because it was done for me,” explained Paul. “The amount of help I got from various charities when I lost my leg was unbelievable, and I just wanted to give something back.”

Paul, who now lives in Southsea, near Portsmouth, underwent training before he was all-set to have his first Telephone Friendship call. He remembers: “I’ve never done anything like this before and I was so afraid before making that first call. I had a script ready to help me, but I didn’t need it because the conversation flowed so naturally.”

With his confidence buoyed, Paul now regularly talks to Telephone Friendship Service users for up to two hours a time. He said: “I love our discussions, I love their stories and what I hear. They just want someone to tell their stories to. They’re lovely but they’re lonely, and they’re all people that have problems, like you and I have. I class them as my friends, and I love to care for them. I get a lot of satisfaction from this.”



Paul loves volunteering for Telephone Friendship Service

Telephone Friendship Service launched in 2023 and is currently used by 54 veterans and partners of veterans, who speak to 29 phone buddies.

Paul added: “It was a very difficult time for me when I lost my leg, but the amount of help that I got from various charities was unbelievable. I recovered and I came out the other side, and I enjoy my life. Now I want to give something back.”

Telephone Friendship Service is run by Royal Star & Garter, which provides loving, compassionate care to veterans and their partners living with disability or dementia, from Homes in Solihull, Surbiton, High Wycombe and Worthing. The charity has also launched new services, such as Telephone Friendship Service, which reach out into the community.

For more information about volunteering with Telephone Friendship Service, go to: <https://starandgarter.org/how-you-can-help/volunteer/telephone-friend/>

To find other ways you can volunteer for Royal Star & Garter, go to: <https://starandgarter.org/how-you-can-help/volunteer-for-us/>



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For more information about Royal Star & Garter, go to www.starandgarter.org

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About Royal Star & Garter

Founded in 1916, Royal Star & Garter provides care, support and friendship for veterans and their families so that they can live well. The charity delivers nursing and dementia care through Homes in Solihull, Surbiton, High Wycombe, and now in Worthing, having recently merged with the military charity Care for Veterans. It also offers a range of services reaching into the community, including Lunch Clubs, Day Care and a national Telephone Friendship Service.

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