

INVERCLYDE VETERANS' INITIATIVE HAILED A SUCCESS

Poppyscotland, the organisation that runs the Scottish Poppy Appeal, and SAMH (Scottish Association for Mental Health), have announced the success of a ground-breaking pilot service for veterans, which was launched in Greenock in May 2009.

Gateways for Veterans is designed to offer specialist support to ex-Servicemen and women experiencing problems associated with alcohol misuse and has already helped change the lives of some local veterans.

It is hoped that the experiences of the scheme's support workers will also help shape the way that assistance is given to veterans with similar difficulties throughout Scotland.

Thomas Cummings, a former Gordon Highlander, who lives in the Inverclyde area, has spoken about the support he has received from the initiative. He said: "On my return to Civvy Street I had relationship, housing and financial problems. I was drinking heavily and I wasn't in a good place at the time. After my marriage broke up I tried to get help, but I felt as if nobody wanted to know or listen and my alcohol problems got worse.

"When I was referred to the service I received a warm and friendly welcome and I worked with the Bridgeworker at a pace that I was comfortable with. Everyone that I have come into contact with has been very helpful and supportive and, more importantly, I feel I am being listened to and included. If it wasn't for SAMH Gateways for Veterans I would never have taken the steps to get myself sorted out."

Inverclyde was chosen to be the base of the trial, due to the area's high veteran population, which is estimated at over 3000.

As well as helping those who seek assistance on the road to recovery, the service supports veterans to re-engage with social networks, reducing the effects of isolation. Veterans are encouraged to take advantage of learning, leisure or volunteering opportunities, enabling them to fulfil their potential as active contributors to the community.

Bernie McKee, from SAMH, who works as a Veterans' Bridgeworker for the service, said: "The aim of the service is to encourage veterans to self manage and make informed choices, which will enable them to take control of their own lives. We work with the veterans to ensure that all those who approach or self refer to the service are treated with dignity and respect, in a non-judgemental manner.

"I am pleased that I've been given the opportunity to become involved in this pilot project within the Inverclyde area, in recognition that there is a need for this type of service within not just the Inverclyde local community but also communities elsewhere."

When the pilot ends in March 2010 Poppyscotland and SAMH will consider the findings and look to shape future services in Scotland. With another four months to run, the charities hope that many more veterans and their families will continue to benefit from the support services available.

Ian McGregor, Chief Executive of Poppyscotland, said: "This is an encouraging start to an extremely worthwhile initiative. Veterans throughout Scotland have a great deal to contribute to society and it is vital that they are given the assistance they need to fulfil their potential.

“We have found over the years that a number of ex-Servicemen and women turn to alcohol as a coping mechanism when they are faced with psychological and physical problems after their time in the Forces. This can lead to further problems and result in social isolation.

“Gateways for Veterans has shown that services such as this can have a hugely positive impact on the lives of veterans and their families coping with alcohol-related issues. We are delighted to be working in partnership with experts in this field, SAMH, and I would like to thank all of those who have helped make this ground-breaking scheme a reality.”

Gateways for Veterans is based at 7/8 Broomhill Way, Greenock PA15 4HE. Anyone who wishes to find out more about the service should contact Bernie McKee, Veterans' Bridgeworker, on 01475 806013 or email gatewaysforveterans@samh.org.uk

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Media contacts:

Poppyscotland

Leigh Howieson: Tel 0131 550 1580 / Louisa MacKenzie: Tel 0131 247 7520

SAMH

Luiza Burns: Tel 0141 568 7189

Notes to Editors:

The Inverclyde alcohol project is jointly funded by the Scottish Veterans' Fund and Poppyscotland

Poppyscotland

Poppyscotland supports more veterans and dependants in Scotland than any other veterans' charity. This is in two ways:

- Directly through financial assistance – last year we helped 1,424 individuals
- Indirectly by supporting veterans' organisations who specialise in veterans' issues, such as Combat Stress and Erskine. In the last five years we have given over £1 million to Erskine alone.

Poppyscotland supports veterans of all ages and, increasingly, those from recent and current conflicts, namely Iraq and Afghanistan.

www.poppyscotland.org.uk

SAMH (Scottish Association for Mental Health)

SAMH is dedicated to mental health and well-being for all. SAMH provides both direct services and an independent voice on all matters of relevance to people with mental health and related problems.

SAMH publication “Life Force: A Practical Guide for Working with Scotland's Veterans” won the Education award at the Military and Civilian Health Partnership Awards 2009.

www.samh.org.uk