

If you join the forces, you join a family.

A Zoom interview with three veterans who found each other through Blesma Connects

Robert Bugden (35), Robert Jordan (64) and Matthew Seviour (46) are members of Blesma, a charity that supports injured or limbless service men and women who served in the UK forces, regardless of where they live. All three veterans are part of the Military family, serving their country to the best of their abilities. The three found each other through the Blesma Connects app.

This article is about Bugden, Jordan and Seviour's life experiences and how Blesma enabled them to adapt to civilian and disabled life.

At first glance, there is not much in common between Robert Bugden, a thrill seeking parachute jumping instructor aged 35, Robert Jordan, a 64 year old retired construction worker and Matthew Seviour, 46 year old football fanatic and father of two teenagers. At different stages of their lives and careers, it's hard to spot the ties that might bind them.

But Robert, Matthew and Jordan are all part of that special family of ex-servicemen who have served their country in some part of the forces: Bugden not surprisingly in the Royal Airforce, Jordan and Seviour in the Army. But more than that – all three are members of Blesma, a charity that supports injured or limbless service men and women who served in the UK forces.

While how and when in their careers they came to be injured differs, Bugden suffering a mid-air collision while on the job with the Air Force teaching other service folk, and Jordan injured on a construction site after leaving the services, to Blesma, this is irrelevant. They served their country and they deserve to be supported.

Blesma members are spread throughout the UK, with some relocating as far afield as the US, Canada and Australia. Recognising that digital technology could help reduce the distance between both Blesma and between their more than 3,000 members, Blesma developed 'Blesma Connects', an app that provides news and updates of interest to members, information on the huge range of activities that Blesma offers members, easy access to assistance from the Support and Outreach officers, and also a chat facility for Blesma members to keep in contact with each other, find new friends with shared interests or just bridge the distance between members – whether that might be a few miles or a few thousand.

At 64, Jordan would love to work again, but recognises his age is against him. Rather than feel sorry for himself, he sews masks for his wife, a nurse, and the vital frontline staff she works with. He keeps in contact with both those he served with and new friends he's made via the app, and he and his wife often attend the social events for members and partners.

Bugden's connection to Blesma is even deeper. Still a thrill-seeker at heart, Bugden still loves jumping out of planes, but now includes his wheelchair in the jump, Bugden is also a fundraiser for Blesma, organising lunches and dinners for other members and their families. His sense of humour undamaged, he commented that 'One of the nice things about the Blesma Connects app is that you can use it even when you have limited hand function like me'.

For Seviour, Blesma Connects is a true part of his support network. The divorced father of two teenagers lost the use of limbs and suffers chronic back pain. His biggest fear is that some unexpected movement, even pulling his socks up, will cause him extreme pain. While medication helps, Seviour is never pain free. Blesma is a true extension of the force's family for Seviour, acting as an extended support network for him from practical chores such as grocery shopping, or sharing his passions and hobbies from yoga, which helps with the pain though scuba diving which keeps the world a fascinating place. Oh, and there's football, with the Blesma Connects app keeping Seviour both connected with others ex-forces mates to share the highs and lows of his team's fortunes, and to keep abreast of the latest news and development, notably around treatments and options that are specifically relevant to him.

With the support of Blesma, members have been able to secure grants to upgrade their houses to better suit their abilities, get the latest in prosthetic technology, undertake training to help them with new careers and remain active and connected to the wider family that binds those who have been in the forces. As Jordan says: 'Family looks after one another no matter what. And the forces are like a family. The first thing you ask on the Blesma Connects app is: what is your service number?'

Blesma Connects – keeping the forces family connected.

The Blesma Connects app

Blesma Connects is provided by Blesma - a charity that, Since World War 1, has offered disabled veterans and their families lifelong support. Blesma partnered with Miroma Project Factory to develop Blesma Connects. The app enables its members:

- to receive relevant news tailored to their individual needs and interests

- to connect and engage in activities with other Blesma members

- easily keep on touch with other members and find old mates

- hear about new routes to secure medical support and grants

easily access the welfare counselling Blesma provides.

This article is based on a Zoom chat between Robert Jordan, Robert Bugden, Matthew Seviour, members of the Blesma support staff and representatives from Miroma Project Factory - a digital arm of the global Miroma Group of agencies.

About Miroma Project Factory

Miroma Project Factory is a multi award-winning digital production and development house that creates innovative and interactive digital products across web, mobile, social media and games platforms. Its' reputation is built on delivering ground-breaking products in entertainment, broadcast and health with a deep specialisation in gamification for engagement and behavioural change.

For more information, please visit www.theprojectfactory.com.

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About Blesma

Blesma, The Limbless Veterans was formed in the years following the First World War and became a national charity in 1932. Blesma is dedicated to assisting serving and ex-Service men and women who have suffered limb loss or the loss of use of a limb, an eye or loss of sight. We support these men and women and their families in their communities throughout the UK and overseas.

Since 1932, we have been the only national Service charity that supports limbless veterans for the duration of their lives; just as we are still caring for our surviving World War II veterans, we also look after those who have survived complex trauma injuries through recent conflicts, accidents or illness, and will need our specialised support as they face the long journey ahead. Blesma aims to ensure that all serving or ex-service men and women who have lost sight, limbs or the use of limbs can lead independent and fulfilling lives and will not be failed, forgotten or left behind.

For more information, please visit <https://blesma.org/>.

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