



Veterans Community Network

Annual Report 2022-23



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Reference and administration details

Charity name	Veterans Community Network
Registered charity number	1191970
Charity's principal address	3 Oaks Farm Park Lane Sharnbrook. Bedford. MK44 1LS.
Accountant and independent examiner	Streets Chartered Accountants

Trustee foreword

I am pleased to provide a forward to this report for VCNs Annual Report 2022 – 2023. This period continued to be a busy year for the Veterans Community Network supporting veterans and their families across Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire.

We saw an increase in partner referrals and self-referrals and increased profile across all counties. Finances are always tight, but VCN are working hard to raise funds through traditional means i.e. events and is looking at raising funds using digital options.

We rented land in Sharnbrook, Veterans Rendezvous Point (RVP), to create a safe space for our veterans to come together and partake in a range of activities or to relax with a cuppa and enjoy the peaceful surroundings. We grow vegetables, herbs and flowers both outdoors and in our polytunnel.

We were fortunate to have an old police incident mobile unit donated where we have created a cosy space to include a small library, comfortable seating with tea and coffee facilities and a crafting table.

We offer support to veterans of all ages through the RVP and our social activities, we also offer transport to those who need it to attend. All in all, another successful year for the Veterans Community Network.

Pat Haslam

Independent Trustee



About us

Veterans Community Network was constituted on 10 June 2020 and commenced its charitable activities on 23 October 2020. The trustees present their second Trustees' Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2023.

The aim of VCN is to support Veterans, Reservists and their families in accessing the treatment and support services to help cope, adjust and manage situations such as mental health, housing, benefits and social isolation. We do this through our network of trained Veteran Peer Mentors and a monthly drop-in Hub.

The trustees that have managed the Charity during the period are as follows:

Trustee name	Position	Date of appointment	Date of resignation
Dr Gillian Le Page	General Trustee and Service Director	28 January 2022	On-going
Keith Le Page	General Trustee	5 May 2022	On-going
Peter Sortwell	General Trustee	5 May 2022	3 May 2023
Patricia Haslam	General Trustee	7 July 2022	On-going



Subsequently, Hannah Cruickshank was appointed as a General Trustee on 3 May 2023 and her position remains on-going.

Structure, governance and management



The Charity is constituted as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation under the Charity Commission “Foundation” model. The Charity is managed by its trustees, which currently number four. The Service Director, Dr Gillian Le Page, deals with all operational matters relating to the delivery of peer mentoring services. The other trustees deal with administrative and financial matters according to their particular area of experience.

The other trustees have been recruited in order to provide the Charity with a broad mix of such experience.

Related parties

Dr Gillian Le Page and one of the other trustees, Keith Le Page, are related parties by family connection. Whenever a conflict of interest had arisen because of this connection, the relevant decision was taken solely by the independent trustees Peter Sortwell, Patricia Haslam and Hannah Cruickshank.

Our objective: To relieve the needs of and to promote the good health and wellbeing of ex-service personnel (HM Armed Forces) and reservists and their families living in Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and South Leicestershire. In particular but not exclusively by providing them with help and assistance and by offering them a professionally supervised social prescribing and peer mentor led care co-ordination service to expert support providers for their benefit and in such other ways as the trustees consider fit.

Our activities

VCN's co-production Veteran Peer Mentor (VPM) model 'bridges the gap' by directly targeting the barriers to engagement and retention in treatment/support. Our **AIM** is to be **A**spirational **I**nspirational and **M**otivational through VPM's lived experience of military life and skills to help them cope, adjust, and thrive in civilian life.

We have continued to prioritise our beneficiaries as being at the heart of everything we do through continued consultation and feedback. During the reporting period, there has been a need for VCN to diversify its service offering through the incorporation of a social prescribing approach which helps to meet the practical, social and emotional needs of our beneficiaries that affect their health and wellbeing through the provision of a range of different non-clinical activities.

The NHS 5 ways to wellbeing (connect with other people, be physically active, learn new skills, give to others (volunteering), and mindfulness) further compliments this approach.

This has all come together through the Rendezvous Point located in Sharnbrook in Bedford, VCN's new Hub. We continue to offer all of our peer mentor support both through the RVP and in the Community across our Geographical foot print.

The number of activities we are now able to offer has grown exponentially because of the increase of funding during the reporting period which has allowed us to employ 2 FTE and 3 PTE workers.

"When I was put in touch with the Veterans Community Network I was really struggling with life mentally and physically. VCN has helped me with housing issues and mental health."

"They have pushed and pushed for me in getting all the help I can. Since meeting with VCN, it has made me more determined to turn my life around and be happier."

"Thank you VCN I can't thank you enough and I appreciate everything you have done and will do for me."

Our regular activities

Tea and banter	Every Tuesday with the exception of the 3 rd Tuesday	Online via zoom
Bedford Veterans Brunch Club	First Saturday of the month	North End Social Club, Bedford
VCN Bedford Drop-in	Third Tuesday of the month	North End Social Club, Bedford
Veterans Get Together	Second Monday of the month	Rivets Sports and Social Club, Aylesbury
Veterans Fire Station walk-in	First Thursday of the month	West Ashlands Fire Station Blue Light Hub, Milton Keynes
Wellingborough Hub	Every fourth Wednesday	The Masonic Hall, Wellingborough
Wellingborough Breakfast Club	Third Saturday of the month	Ock n Dough, Wellingborough
Rendezvous Point	Thursdays and Sundays	The Cock and Pullet, Sharnbrook
Rendezvous Point (ladies day)	Tuesdays	The Cock and Pullet, Sharnbrook



Additional events

Other social events held this year include

- The VCN Conference in May 2022
- Bedford Garden Party in July 2022
- Autumn Fayre at the Reservist Centre in Blakelands, Milton Keynes in September 2022
- Xmas Fayre in Bedford in November 2022

Autumn Fayre



VCN Conference



Beds Garden Party



Christmas Party



Achievements and performance – Dr Gill Le Page, Service Director

During this reporting period, VCN's main source of funding was from the Armed Forces Covenant Trust (AFCT) Veterans People, Places Pathways Grant (V PPP) programme.

The difference with the structure of this programme was that the grants were divided between a number of programme portfolios across the UK. Each programme had a consortium lead with several projects working closely together within the region. This has facilitated greater partnership working, and sharing of good practice. In addition, national learning support was provided to all areas through the Combat Stress Learning Platform and the launch of the Mental Health Veterans Standards hosted by COBSEO.

The role of the Service Director has been to roll out the three programmes including the recruitment, induction and supervision for all staff and performance management of the targets.

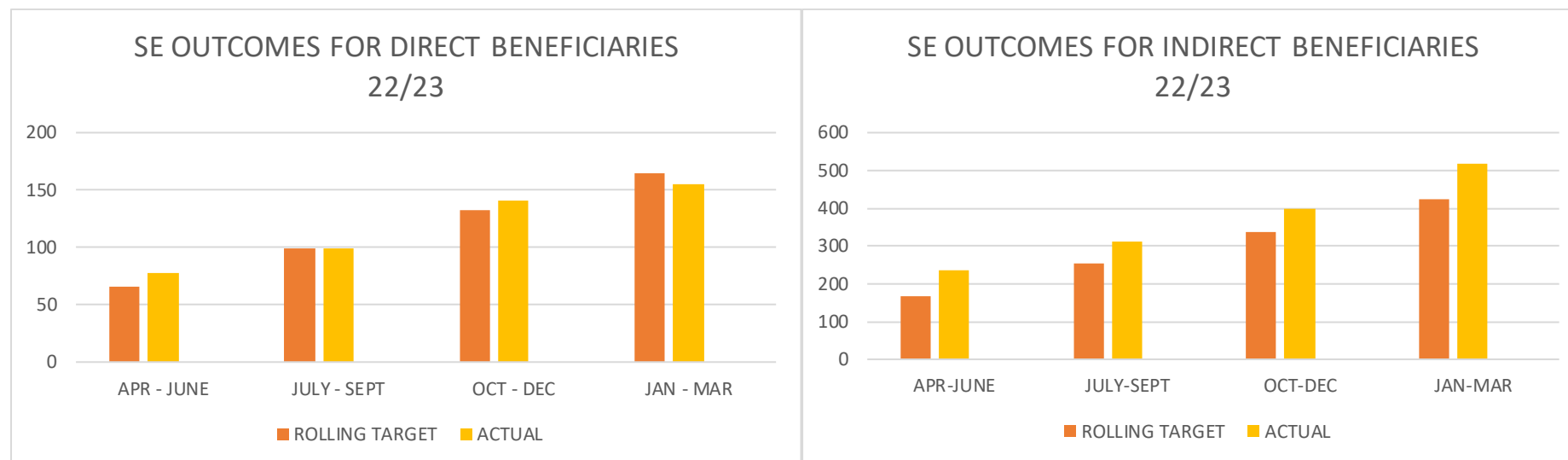
During the induction period, all of the team completed mandatory training including safeguarding, prevent, equal opportunities and domestic abuse awareness. The team were also able to access mental health first aid training as well as completing the in-house peer mentor training.

Monthly supervision is provided to all staff and this is given a high priority so that staff can access the appropriate support, guidance and reflective learning. For such a small team, the amount of support that has been delivered to veterans, reservists and family members has been exceptional. Whilst the numbers give some idea of the quantitative data, they do not do justice to the hours of support that are sometimes dedicated to our beneficiaries at times of crisis.

I am delighted to present the outcomes for all three projects for the reporting period. Quarterly rolling targets were set at the project commencement in relation to the number of beneficiaries who had accessed the service to date.

"I could talk to you
all day.
"Few people have
such a good impact
on me."

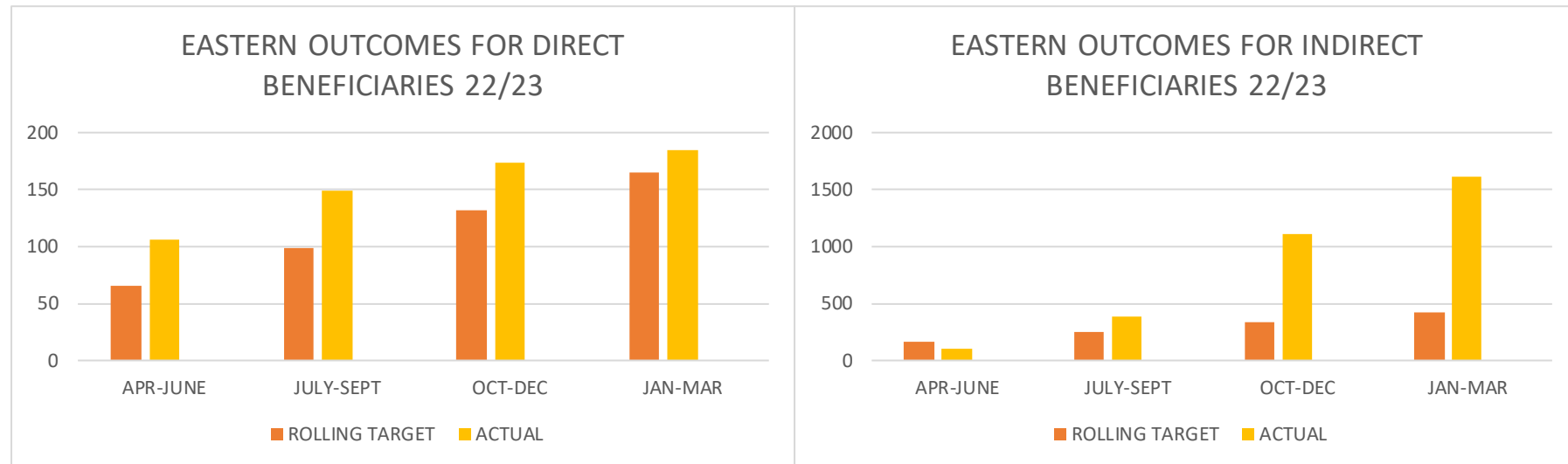
South East (Buckinghamshire) Portfolio Lead: Veterans Outreach Support. Peer Support Worker: Paul Dunkley
quantitative data



Beneficiary case study

Male army veteran aged 49 yrs. Self-referred in November 2020. He had been dipping in and out of VCN support for over 18 months. Given help with housing arrears and support at court, onward referral to local alcohol services and a referral to Op Courage where he was diagnosed with complex PTSD. He was given appointments to see a therapist out of area so VCN provided weekly transport for him so that he could attend. He did well and was stepped down from regular support. However, in September 2022 he came back into VCN for support. He was in debt and had contacted the Royal British Legion for help. RBL were struggling to maintain contact so VCN was able to offer support by attending his home address and allowing him to use the VCN work mobile so he could talk with RBL. During this conversation, it became clear that he would benefit from some expert benefits advice. VCN was able to support him to attend the Blue Light Hub where he was able to speak with the DWP veterans lead who gave him some solid advice and on-going support.

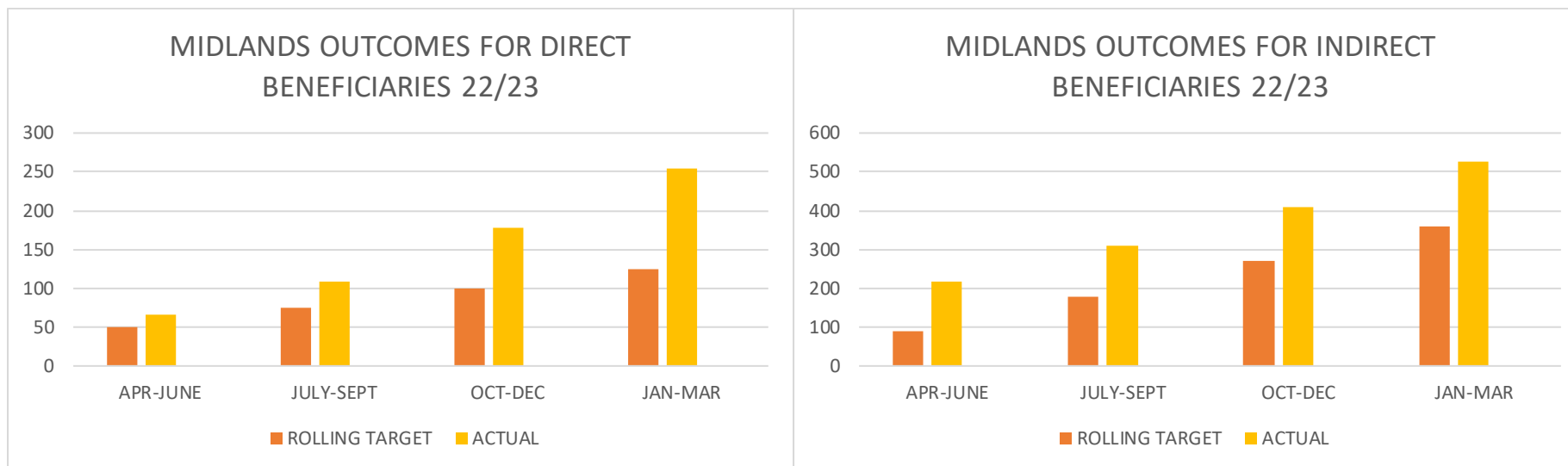
Eastern (Bedfordshire) quantitative data



Beneficiary case study

Male army veteran, aged 45 years. Self-referred in May 2021 following a mental health crisis. History of alcohol misuse, offending behaviour currently on licence but recently recalled back to Court as missed two probation appointments. VCN went with him to the court and liaised with Court Probation and IOM. VCN wrote a letter of support in relation to the progress he had made in the past 18 months and explained the circumstances behind his nonattendance at appointments (due to being a victim of an assault). Probation decided to withdraw the recall application as they did not feel it was in the interest of public justice. He has been able to reduce his alcohol consumption, is more stable in his mental health and working in partnership with the local alcohol service, he has commenced the assessment process for Res Rehab at Tom Harrison House. He has also been connected with Royal British Legion for support.

Midlands (Northamptonshire) quantitative data



Beneficiary case study

Male, army veteran, 31 years. Referred to VCN by Project Nova for 1-1 support. He was having significant issues with his ex-partner which had resulted in him being arrested and charged with assault. Initially, Project Nova was supporting the criminal justice involvement but as they were not able to support him at a court appearance, VCN stepped in to support & attended court with him.

Having spent time with him, a referral was made to Op Courage to assess for service related PTSD. He also disclosed that he had a diagnosis of Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder (EUPD) but did not appear to be engaged with MH services. VCN has supported him to access MH services by making an appropriate referral and are providing interim support to him through an evidence based psychosocial self-help workbook "Keeping Calm".

The Court gave thanks to VCN for the intensive support they have been able to offer him and in part they stated that this influenced their decision not to impose a custodial sentence.

Defence Garden Scheme, Chicksands Bedfordshire

VCN was delighted to be approached by the Defence Garden Scheme to work in partnership with them to deliver their 8 session Horticulture Therapy at the walled garden in Chicksands.

The course ran from May to July 2022 with 7 participants. During the sessions, participants were able to learn about growing and nurturing plants, mindfulness and healthy eating.

VCN provided transport for those veterans who were not able to get there and in particular this support together with 1-1 peer mentor support meant that two of the veterans who were registered blind, could access the course safely.

“I have benefited from being around people that understand how I feel, also being in a very safe and comfortable place and learning different things” Male Army Veteran.

“The RVP has given me a space to meet friends and relax. Somewhere I can indulge in the art of growing, literally and mentally”. Male Army Veteran.



Veterans Hub at Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire

The VCN Veterans Hub pilot in partnership with a local animal sanctuary went live in mid July 2022 with 8 people attending the first session. The Hub was open on Tuesdays from 1000 – 1500.

Veterans had the opportunity to get involved in building projects, gardening, painting, spinning, dyeing & weaving, furniture renovation, tea cake & banter.

The Veterans Hub provided a safe place for veterans in crisis where they can access support from VCN peer mentors. This project was led by Michael Potter one of the peer support workers for Eastern Region and a former Royal Green Jacket.

Renovation of a wood burner stove



Carding wool ready for spinning



Unfortunately, due to contractual issues, VCN was not able to continue with the local animal sanctuary and a new partnership was formed with The Cock and Pullet Chicken Farm in Sharnbrook in January 2022 with The Rendezvous Point going live in March 2022.



Aspirational Eastern Region

Tina Griffiths: "I began working with VCN in Feb 2021 as a Social Activities Coordinator and Older Veteran Engagement Lead covering Bedford and Milton Keynes.

This year I have worked closely with 8 elderly Veterans on a one-to-one basis to ensure they did not feel isolated and were provided with the support they deserve. Over the year, I assisted them with a wide variety of issues they were either struggling with or unable to do themselves.

I also assist with mail and paperwork for the Veterans I visit and over the year I successfully contested a parking fine for one Vet, wrote to a bank to get a mobile number amended when they refused to do it over the phone and claimed a refund for overpaid council tax.

In my other role as Social Activities Coordinator, I am responsible for running a weekly Tea & Banter meeting held via zoom and arranging occasional speakers, presentations and quizzes.

In September 2022 I began to work in partnership with The Company of Makers, another Veterans' charity, with whom I have held a number of photography workshops at our Tea & Banter meetings. These proved popular and well attended. I hold a face-to-face Drop-in and a regular breakfast club for Veterans at the North End Club in Bedford and Ousebank House in Milton Keynes. We provide tea or coffee, and they have the opportunity to chat to other Veterans as well as take part in the occasional team quiz."



Bedford-drop-in at the North End Club

Inspirational South East Region

Paul Dunkley: "I currently work as a Veterans Peer Support Worker with the Veterans Community Network. I am a veteran myself having served 22 years in the Royal Marines, so I can provide that valuable lived in experience to my service users.

My area of responsibility is Buckinghamshire which includes Aylesbury, Wycombe and Milton Keynes. My primary role involves one to one support of my service users and their families. I find many of my service users have struggled when transitioning from the armed forces to civvy street. They are typically stereotyped and they strongly feel let down by society. My responsibility is to support, motivate, keep them focused and to ensure that they realise they are an integral part of today's society.

One of my greatest achievements so far was supporting a service user who was facing a lengthy custodial sentence. I attended his court hearing and my supporting letter helped him to get a suspended sentence.

I gently encourage my service users to engage with other veterans and I have set up a Blue Light Hub in Milton Keynes which runs every first Thursday. They can attend and tea & coffee are readily available, eat bacon rolls and participate in military banter.

Finally, my main aim is to be a good role model to all my service users. My goals are to support all my service users to live the happiest and healthiest lifestyle for which they truly deserve for their services to this country."



Paul Dunkley (third from the right) attends the Armed Forces Covenant signing in London with our Partners CNWL NHS Mental Health Trust

Motivational Midlands Region

Sher George: "I am a Peer Mentor with the Veterans Community Network, covering Northamptonshire. My role consists of helping our clients with various issues that might include housing, benefits, mental health (including drug & alcohol use) and socialising, supporting them to gain access into the right treatment at the right time. Many struggle when transitioning and feel let down, isolated and experience loneliness so I motivate and inspire them to try and believe they can move forward.

Family members struggle too when they see their husband, wife or parent unable to cope in 'civvie street' so as Peer Mentors our skills also relate to helping them gain the relevant support which will then give them understanding of what the veteran is experiencing. Working closely with all of these concerns is crucial in getting the right result so that each individual's referral is specific to their needs and the relationship with these groups is extremely positive.

Socialising is something many veterans refrain from due to mental health issues such as PTSD. However we gently encourage them to engage and as a result, in Northamptonshire we have set up various activities for them to be get involved in, in a safe environment. On the third Saturday of the month we hold a 'Breakfast Club' where we have anything from fifteen to 30 veterans of all ages attend where breakfast, a cuppa and military banter is enjoyed by all. On the 4th Wednesday of the month we hold a 'Veteran Hub'.

Our ultimate goal is for each service user to live the happy, healthy life they richly deserve."



VCN Team, volunteers and veterans at Mission Motor Sport Event at Silverstone February 2023

Financial review, Accounts and Independent Examiner's Report at 31 March 2023

Unrestricted Funds and Policy on Reserves

At the year end the Charity had accumulated unrestricted funds amounting to £19,066, substantially unchanged from the previous year-end. This is to provide for the Designated Funds described below and for the on-going operating costs of the Charity. The Charity has adopted the retention of reserves policy that the Charity intends to hold as a minimum one month's salary and contract costs as Designated Funds. The main purpose of this reserves policy is to fund shortfalls in income, when income does not reach expected levels or if a grant is not renewed and to enable continuity of staff employment in these circumstances, as was experienced in one instance during the year.

Restricted Funds and Principal Source of Funding

The Charity's principal source of funding is grant income from support providers for the provision of social prescribing and peer mentoring services. The grant income is usually earned under fixed term contracts. At the end of the period end restricted funds amounted to £6,374 representing the balance of funds remaining on unexpired contracts. As previously reported, during the year one contract was terminated early for reasons beyond the control of the Charity and the residual grant income of £8,123 was repaid to the support provider. The Trustees took the decision to honour the employment contracts of the staff members and to continue providing the services for the full term. The unfunded cost was borne by the Unrestricted Funds.

Declaration

The trustees declare that they have approved the Trustees' Annual Report above.

Signed on behalf of the Charity's trustees.

Signature	
Trustee Name	Keith Le Page
Position	General Trustee

Date: 29 January 2024

Section A Receipts and Payments Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2023

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds		Total funds	Last year
	to the nearest £	to the nearest £		to the nearest £	to the nearest £
A1 Receipts					
Grant Income	5,750	91,890		97,640	58,419
Training Course Income				-	1,120
Donations	4,158			4,158	6,799
	-	-		-	-
Sub total (Gross income for AR)	9,908	91,890		101,798	66,338
Total receipts	9,908	91,890		101,798	66,338
A3 Payments					
Cost of Goods Sold	464	3,234		3,698	919
Direct Expenses	181	513		694	587
Direct Wages	6,894	13,633		20,527	22,462
Advertising & Marketing	140	1,223		1,363	468
Accountancy Fees	750	-		750	-
General Expenses	271	402		673	3,415
Insurance	725	-		725	302
IT Software and Consumables	168	-		168	670
Postage, Freight & Courier	22	10		32	25
Repairs	273	-		273	
Return of Grant Income	-	8,123		8,123	
Salaries, Ni and Pension	-	63,656		63,656	1,582
Staff Training	-	180		180	907
Subscriptions	628	214		842	924
Telephone	-	-		-	
Motor and Travel Costs	4	8,164		8,168	409
Rent	60	-		60	95
	-	-		-	-
Sub total	10,580	99,352		109,932	32,765
Total payments	10,580	99,352		109,932	32,765
Net of receipts/(payments)	(672)	(7,462)		(8,134)	33,573
A5 Transfers between funds	799	(799)		-	-
A6 Cash funds last year end	18,938	14,635		33,573	-
Cash funds this year end	19,066	6,374		25,439	33,573

Section B Statement of Assets and Liabilities at 31 March 2023

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	
B1 Cash funds	Cash at Bank	19,066	6,374	
		-	-	
		-	-	
	Total cash funds	19,066	6,374	
	Details	Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	
B5 Liabilities	PAYE Creditor	Restricted Funds	5,114	
	Pension Creditor	Restricted Funds	327	
	Aged Payables	Restricted Funds	213	
	Aged Payables	Unrestricted Funds	3,192	
Signed by one trustee on behalf of all the trustees	Signature	Print Name		Date of approval
		Keith Le Page		29/01/2024



CHARITY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Independent examiner's report on the accounts

Section A

Independent Examiner's Report

Report to the trustees/ members of

Charity Name

Veterans Community Network

On accounts for the year ended

31 March 2023

**Charity no
(if any)**

1191970

Set out on pages

1 to 20

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended 31/03/2023.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity trustees of the Trust, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention (other than that disclosed below *) in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Act or
- the accounts do not accord with the accounting records

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

** Please delete the words in the brackets if they do not apply.*

Signed:



Date: 29/01/2024

Name:

Alan Endersby

Relevant professional qualification(s) or body (if any):

ACA

Address:

Streets S J Males Limited, Basepoint Business & Innovation Centre,

110 Butterfield, Luton LU2 8DL

Only complete if the examiner needs to highlight matters of concern (see CC32, Independent examination of charity accounts: directions and guidance for examiners).

Give here brief details of any items that the examiner wishes to disclose.

None.