



How can the Rescue Benevolent Fund help support you?

JUDY WHITESIDE BENEVOLENT FUND SECRETARY

It's been six months since my last update on behalf of the Rescue Benevolent Fund, in the April magazine and, rather than just rearranging the same old words into a slightly fresher version of themselves – about what the fund can do for you, how to apply for support and how to donate (although you know I'll be doing that too) – this time I have news about additional support we are able to offer, including online and telephone counselling.

Those of you familiar with the workings of the fund (and there are more of you than might appear to be the case, flying under the wire of confidentiality), will know that from the start we have had a working agreement with the Fire Fighters Charity (FFC) thanks to the efforts of one of our regional reps, Laura Connolly, who just happens to work at one of their centres as a physiotherapist. It's been a fruitful relationship and a number of you have benefited from the physical rehabilitation they can offer after injury, fully supported by the fund.

Well, this July we renewed that contract but, more importantly perhaps, they have extended the offering of what they can do to support us. Prompted by last year's lockdowns and the ongoing limitations of the pandemic, with people no longer able to travel to, and take advantage of, their residential services (which were closed to us for a long period), they began to look at how they could offer their services online. And we

think this new way of working more flexibly will be something that team members and their families will be able to access more easily, meaning they get the help they need sooner.

And there is still the option to spend four days at one of their residential centres, ideal for anyone needing physical rehabilitation treatment and care to get them literally back on their feet and active again.

BLENDED PHYSICAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SUPPORT

Their so-called 'blended health and wellbeing support' is tailored to the individual with a number of different options, depending on need. Both physical and psychological conditions are provided for through a 'blended' approach using the residential centres and/or their new digital platforms, personalised to help enhance recovery.

There are three residential centres around the country, where the charity invites clients to focus on their health and wellbeing. Clients who have a predominantly physical health need will be invited to either Marine Court in Littlehampton, West Sussex or

This support might come in a series of digital (either online or by telephone) counselling sessions between the client and a member of the Fire Fighters Charity clinical team, again following an initial consultation to assess need and identify a suitable

place), to secure the best possible treatment for you. If this involves you seeing someone more local to you, we will liaise with the therapists and clinicians in question and ask that their bills come direct to us for payment.

Our philosophy is all about getting you back to activity and a better sense of wellbeing and making that process as pain free as we possibly can for you.

WHAT OTHER SUPPORT CAN WE OFFER?

Of course, it may be that you don't require physical or mental health rehab and care. So, for the record, over our eight years or so 'in business', we've also helped support team members through temporary financial hardship and offered immediate grant financial help to bridge the gap between insurance claim and pay-out, and we've also supported families with their funeral costs for a team member's death 'in duty'. Following the Patterdale incident, we looked at how we could help in future, should a similar incident occur where an individual team member and their family requires more sustained intensive care and support. Whilst the fund itself ticks along, able to support the claims we have thus far received, we don't hold the sort of money that sort of claim might require. But that

Jubilee House in Penrith, Cumbria, which also houses a dedicated nursing team. Delivery of the physical programme is usually in a group setting with additional one-to-one interventions which may include physiotherapy, exercise prescription, gym, swimming pool or hydrotherapy pool sessions and health and wellbeing workshops.

Meanwhile, the third centre, at Harcombe House, in Chudleigh, Devon is able to deal with clients with psychological health referrals or long-term or chronic physical health issues. Delivery of the programme here is also in a group setting with individual specifics including psychoeducational workshops, mindfulness-based activities, physiotherapy, exercise prescription, gym, swimming pool and hydrotherapy pool sessions.

Please don't be put off applying for support at one of these centres, however, by the prospect of a long, long journey to the opposite end of the country. If the fund agrees to support your care and you live outside a fifty-mile radius, we are currently offering to support your travel expenses too.

The major change to the 'blended' package offered by the Fire Fighters Charity is in their additional online support. Anyone we refer to them for their physical or psychological health and wellbeing can also expect to access their online 'digital physical health and wellbeing'.

Following an initial consultation to assess need and identify a treatment programme, for up to 60 minutes, this support might include a series of digital online or telephone physiotherapy sessions between the client and a member of the clinical team with up to three follow-up sessions. Each follow-up session will be between 30-60 minutes. Exercises may be prescribed using a digital exercise programme.

ONLINE AND TELEPHONE PSYCHOLOGICAL CARE

Separate to this, they are also offering the opportunity for online psychological health and wellbeing. So, if there is a need for psychological counselling and you feel unable to access this with a therapist local to you — for whatever reason — this might just offer a way forward.

treatment programme. This initial consultation would be for up to 60 minutes. Up to five follow-up sessions will then be agreed between the clinician and the client, up to 60 minutes each.

The process for all this is that first you apply to the Rescue Benevolent Fund for our support then, once we've agreed to support your treatment financially, we refer you to the FFC. Once they have your details, one of their clinicians calls you for that initial assessment, agrees a course of treatment, lets us know you're in the system and then it's over to you — with us keeping a watchful eye on your progress.

So what happens if, for some reason they



Opposite: Physical rehabilitation and counselling are both on the 'shopping list' for the Rescue Benevolent Fund. Images via Pixabay. **Above:** The hydrotherapy pool at Harcombe House, the Fire Fighters Charity centre in Devon © FFC.

can't help you — for example, if you need more immediate specialist psychological care? Well, once we've agreed to support you, we will work with you and your team or your loved ones (whoever sponsored or encouraged your application in the first

doesn't preclude our support. Our constitution allows us to fundraise for particular circumstances and causes, within the parameters of our declared support for mountain and cave rescuers and their families, and we would be happy to do so.

So please don't discount our ability to help on a larger scale without talking to us first to discuss the possibilities.

WHERE DO OUR OPERATIONAL BOUNDARIES LIE?

Similarly, another interesting query came in to me, only recently: would we be prepared to support a team member claiming from outwith England and Wales? Again, our constitution/declaration of trust is worded such that we are not defined by geographical area so, in theory, yes. (Just as, incidentally, we'd be happy to accept donations from outwith England and Wales!)

And, in theory, as we grew from a collaboration between MREW and BCRC (which incorporates both Scottish and Irish cave rescue teams) we already cover a far wider area than MREW territory alone. There's also the consideration that many teams in both England and Wales often work on incidents and train with teams both north of the Border in Scotland and across the Irish Sea.

Essentially, the process would be the same and the claim assessed on the same criteria as any other. One question we always ask is whether there are any other claims in place to cover the same injury or issue, be that insurance claims or other benevolent fund claims — and the responses would inevitably factor in to our eventual decision.

HOW DO YOU CLAIM?

Okay here comes the 'rearranging the same words into a not so different way of saying the same thing' bit.

In the first instance, email me at secretary@rescuebenevolent.fund and ask for an application form. (We are looking into creating an online form to make this easier for applicants). We can't do anything until we receive that and know what we're dealing with. I'm always happy to hear from you via my editor@mountain.rescue.org.uk address, but be aware that this is then addressed to me wearing a very different hat and potentially accessible to eyes other than mine (in perpetuity), so I will transfer subsequent correspondence to the Rescue Benevolent Fund address for the purposes of retaining a confidential email thread.

Once a claim comes in, we aim to respond within a couple of days to acknowledge receipt and call a meeting of the trustees at the earliest opportunity. Depending on the complexity of the claim, sometimes we are able to make a decision within the week. Often, we involve the fund's regional reps, but they are only ever privy to a redacted version of the details, with all papers collected in after any meeting (or a spoken summary if we meet online) — again, to preserve confidentiality. Although the final decision lies with the trustees, their knowledge and professional experience can be invaluable in the decision-making process. If the claim is particularly complex, we may ask for more details before making

a decision. Whatever happens, we aim to keep you informed every step of the way.

It's worth repeating again: if you or your family need help due to physical or emotional injury or financial hardship resulting from a mountain or cave rescue-related activity, then we are here for you.

DO EITHER MREW AND BCRC INFLUENCE THE FUND AND ITS DECISION-MAKING?

In a word, no. While those two organisations provided the drive for a dedicated benevolent fund, and remain supportive of its development and progress, any decisions are made solely by the fund's trustees and regional reps, as described.

WILL DETAILS OF MY CLAIM EVER BE SHARED WITH MREW OR BCRC, OR MADE PUBLIC?

Again, no. The fund is an entirely independent charity, neither governed by nor answerable to MREW and BCRC and therefore not obliged to share any information. All claims are treated with the utmost confidentiality, according to our confidentiality policy and the fund trustees and regional reps are required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Where an incident is high profile and details of any related claim already in the public domain, the trustees will apply the same rules of confidentiality as far as possible. From time to time, we may ask a claimant to share their story for the benefit of future claimants and/or to help fundraising initiatives but would first secure their written agreement. Indeed, stories of previous beneficiaries (of both physical and psychological therapy) have already appeared in this very magazine, with their permission.

So it's worth repeating again: if you or your family need help due to physical or emotional injury or financial hardship resulting from a mountain or cave rescue-related activity, then we are here for you.

HOW DO I DONATE?

And finally, if you would like to donate to the fund, or raise money on our behalf, again just drop me an email at secretary@rescuebenevolent.fund and I will supply the bank details. A huge thank you to all who have donated already, either through single donation or regular standing order. Every penny is appreciated and put to good use. We couldn't continue without you, that's for sure, but we hope that our being here can help you continue too. 🙏

