

Immediate release

## RAF Benevolent Fund launches new community scheme to help isolated RAF veterans



Caption: From left Community Engagement Workers Matt Rowe, Cambridgeshire, Sue Grogan, Norfolk, Graeme Spark, Lincolnshire and Declan Geraghty, Suffolk. Photo: RAF Benevolent Fund

Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire have been selected as pilot locations for a new project aimed at supporting RAF veterans who face loneliness and isolation.

The RAF Benevolent Fund, the RAF's leading welfare charity, is launching a Community Engagement Worker scheme to help older RAF veterans get involved in their local communities. The scheme comes in response to research carried out by the Fund which highlighted these challenges as issues which most concern the older generation of RAF veterans.

**Pete Ashcroft, Welfare Projects Manager at the RAF Benevolent Fund, said:** "The Community Engagement Worker project is just one measure we have introduced to tackle the issue of loneliness and social isolation among older veterans. Other new initiatives include telephone friendship groups and group wellbeing breaks.

This year marks the RAF Benevolent Fund's centenary and we are asking the public to help us reach out to the members of the RAF Family who may have fallen off the radar and let them know, we are here to help. We want to ensure every RAF veteran, no matter how long they served, including National Service, receives the support their service to their country deserves. We want to get these people back onto the radar, and we aim to almost double the number of people we help – from 53,000 to at least 100,000 over the next three years".

The Community Engagement Workers will get to know the social activities, groups and associations across the four counties and work with individuals to understand what the barriers are to them becoming more socially engaged and help them to overcome that, from attending a veterans' breakfast meeting with someone for the first time, to establishing activities where none currently exist.

Graeme Spark, of Grantham, will be taking on the Lincolnshire Community Engagement Worker role. His 29-year career in the Royal Air Force means he knows the service well.

**He said:** "It has always been deeply humbling, the sacrifices that those who fought before us made and as an RAF veteran I have some insight into that.

“This is an opportunity of a lifetime, and I feel like I’m part of the RAF family again. Success in this job is going to be very different for each person. This is about individuals and what they need to feel part of the RAF Family, and the wider community again.”

The pilot scheme will run for two years.

Ends

**For more information please contact:**

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**RAF Benevolent Fund:** The RAF Benevolent Fund offers a wide range of support for serving and former serving personnel and their families, from financial grants for one-off and day-to-day costs, respite breaks and emotional support. Last year it spent £21M on welfare support for the RAF Family, including:

- £1M on mobility aids
- £439K on care home top-up fees
- £457K on disability equipment
- £2.6M providing respite and care services and wellbeing breaks
- £500K supporting veterans living outside the United Kingdom

To refer someone to the RAF Benevolent Fund, go to [www.rafbf.org](http://www.rafbf.org) or call 0300 102 1919.

**Notes to Editors:** Our new radar advert, pictures and film from our radar campaign launch as well as case studies can be downloaded here: <http://bit.ly/RAFBF100-Press>