

Honour Our Troops

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 12th MAY 2018

Firstly, thank you all for your hard work this year. It has been an unusual year in relation to many of the aspects that Honour Our Troops undertakes and I will take each section in turn.

Fundraising

As far as fundraising is concerned I have not done any personally this year, but I know the Marshalls have been working really hard.

Raising funds to maintain our Charity and to give us the ability to grant funds, both to individuals and projects, is a big part of our remit. During the 8 years I have been part of Honour Our Troops I have seen donations rise and fall and this previous year has seen a dip. Looking at the charity sector as a whole, it is clear that many personal donors are suffering charity fatigue; that is the tiring of the population due to being inundated by requests for donations from all kinds of charities. As the government cannot cover all aspects of life, it became clear a number of years ago that the charities sector would be heavily relied upon in the future for services and this has now come to pass. It is not only a fatigue of giving aid to those abroad, but also to those in need at home. Couple this with the year on year rate of inflation and wages not being kept in line and several election votes and a referendum that have involved the whole adult population, it seems no wonder that there is turmoil and less money to be used as disposable income to help others. Corporate organisations are also feeling the pinch and there has been an overall marked reduction in corporate backing for charities. In the main, corporate organisations have shown a tendency towards supporting big name charities and this has left smaller charities working harder than ever to raise funds, not only to maintain the support that they give to others, but also to maintain the day to day running of the charity.

Taking this into account it makes me very proud that Honour Our Troops still has no paid staff and relies on the Trustees, volunteers and supporters for the day to day running of our charity and our projects. It is also of note that the vast majority of our work does not lie with granting funds, but with granting time, effort, knowledge and skills and this has proved more helpful in the long run. It also makes me proud that we keep our expenses and overheads as low as we can.

Trust is also an aspect that needs to be addressed in everything we do. A number of years ago we witnessed large charities being defrauded and/or the wages of the employees were deemed to be inflated. This damage was not limited as the fallout from these incidents were felt by us as well. Potential donors want to know where their money is going and ask for transparency - and so they should. Honour Our Troops maintains our transparency at all times and anyone can ask us anything and we will endeavour to answer them as fully as we possibly can.

In the coming year, I would urge all of our Trustees, volunteers and supporters to help in raising funds. I know that two of our Trustees are looking into expanding our social media and registering with different fund raising projects as they want to concentrate on how to engage the online communities. We already receive donations from Paypal Giving and raise funds through our Virgin Money Giving account and GiveACar has proved incredibly generous with donors giving their cars and motorbikes to us instead of sending them for scrap. Another two Trustees are concentrating on the traditional approaches to fundraising and have dates booked for coffee mornings and a sponsored wax. Of course our Marshalls will be out again this year and this raises funds for us as they only request a donation for their work. If you support Honour Our Troops then please think about raising funds for us.

Marshals

As I have said before, our Marshals do an incredible job in maintaining safety at events for other organisations and working with the Police and Police Scotland to make a seamless transition to cause the least disruption for both participants and the public. Covering events in Kelso and Coldstream in the Scottish Borders and also maintaining their coverage of Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day. Their role is varied, as sometimes they are maintaining public safety with regards to crowds and other times it is redirecting traffic to allow participants an unhindered parade or cavalcade. Having been up to Scotland to volunteer as a Marshal myself, I can honestly say that the organisation, efficiency and delivery of this service is second to none. All of our Marshals are professional and maintain dignity and respect of themselves, the public and the other agencies they work with and for at all times, yet they still manage to have fun whilst doing so. The investment of buying six radios and ten hi-viz vests a few years ago has paid off and I commend them for their diligence and giving of their time and expertise to not only raise funds, but to help in the wider community which often incorporates our veterans.

Administration

As I have said before, I am very proud that we have no paid staff and that our costs are kept to a minimum, but it would not be possible without the ongoing hard work of our Secretary and Bookkeeper. Mrs Francisca Brunet-Burgess has maintained our files well and continues to ensure that our annual returns are on time and explained in full. Along with this she has followed up with actions from our minutes and pressed us into using Google Hangouts for quarterly meetings, which has meant that all the Trustees feel a little more connected in spite of our differing geographical locations. We recognise that our procedures and protocols need to be reviewed and updated and this year that task will fall to me with the support of the other Trustees. Our Bookkeeper Mr Geoff Levy has been on hand to make sure that all of our accounts are in good order and has done so with the minimum of fuss. His role also includes submitting the annual returns (working with Mrs Brunet-Burgess) and the accounts and being aware of any changes in legislation with regards to reporting financial statements. We currently do not have a Treasurer and therefore many of their duties are now dealt with by Mr Levy who has also presented the Board with a number of good suggestions. Mrs McCall and I continue to keep all the other Trustees apprised of any changes in legislation throughout the United Kingdom.

Projects

The main project we have is The Poppy Project 2014 - 2018 by Honour Our Troops to mark the centenary of World War 1. This is a community led project setup and maintained by Honour Our Troops in the Scottish Borders particularly Coldstream. Each year they have displayed poppies throughout the town which have been handmade using various materials and crafted by over 50 volunteers. The poppies are displayed two weeks before Armistice Day and the culmination is a candlelight at the local War Memorial at night. This is not a fundraiser, as the organisers ask that people donate to the Poppy Appeal or Poppyscotland and/or Animal Aid (purple poppies). All the materials used to make the poppies must be recycled or recyclable and they are already underway with creating their displays for 2018 which is the final year. The Poppy Project has received £600 from their local Co-op, along with the promise of staff volunteer hours, and £750 from the Hudson Hirsell Fund. Both these grants are to upgrade the War Memorial Gardens in Coldstream to return it to a place of peace and contemplation. The Poppy Project is looking to have a bench put in the gardens along with low lighting and some form of easily maintained planting thus endeavouring to make it a safer and more welcoming space.

East Surrey College has also made Armistice a project with the aim to educate and inform the younger generations of World War 1 and its' ongoing impact in our daily lives both here and around the world. They have held a candlelight previously, which raised funds and marked Armistice Day within the College at the 11th hour with full parade and Standards in attendance.

The Coming Year 2017/2018

Our emphasis must be on fundraising in this coming year. Not only to maintain the charity with all the various roles we undertake, but also to boost funding for the giving out of grants to projects that would otherwise be overlooked by larger charities.

The purchasing of new t-shirts has become an essential as this is a good way to promote ourselves and leads to easy identification when attending events and working on our projects. We also need to purchase two new banners with the new logo on for when we are holding events. Again this makes us easily identifiable and helps with promotion.

We are still having to look for projects and individuals to give grants to and I would like to see the Trustees come up with ideas of how to promote this aspect of our remit. Bearing in mind that we cannot arbitrarily grant funds to the day to day running of another charity, our grants must be for a set project or individual and fall within the amount between £50 and £1,000.

Last Words

As Chairman, I am immensely proud of our accomplishments and achievements over the past 8 years and look forward to many more. With the balance swaying continually between, feeling proud and tiring due to how much work is involved, it is the support of our volunteers and the public as a whole that keeps us going. Being the only charity we can find whose remit covers past, present and future of our Armed Forces and their dependents, I feel it is incumbent on us all to remain true to our all encompassing remit and take our charity forward over the coming years. With technology on the rise, it is an avenue to be explored and for new and innovative ideas to grow forth. The busy lives we all lead make it all too easy to forget or overlook those who are less able or in need and that should not happen. We should endeavour to help one member of our Armed Forces whether serving, veteran or cadet each week. Whether that is through grants, the giving of our time or more pragmatic support, all of it adds up to our Armed Forces being a complete part of our society, no matter what they have encountered or may be living through right now.

Once again, were it not for your support, hard work and indomitable spirit we would not have come as far as we have and we appreciate every moment of your time that you give us, every modicum of knowledge you impart on our behalf and every penny you donate to us. Thank you.

Mr Christopher Palmer
Chairman
Honour Our Troops