



**ROYAL NAVAL
ASSOCIATION**

WELFARE & WELLBEING

VOLUNTEERS HANDBOOK

Version 1 / 2025



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**ROYAL NAVAL
ASSOCIATION**

RNA National Chairman

Dear Shipmates,

Welcome to the RNA Welfare and Wellbeing Handbook.

As you may be aware the Association has upgraded its Welfare and Wellbeing (WW) organisation to better support Shipmates across our community and ensure the RNA conforms to current guidelines and practices.

The intention is to best safeguard (forgive the pun) the Area/Branch Welfare support Shipmates as it is vital that they are aware of current process and practices. As reassurance there is no proposal to alter the way Branch Welfare Support Officers operate who should continue signposting and placing an arm round the shoulder of their shipmates. Moreover, the RNA has a number of professionals who are employed professionally in areas such as 'safeguarding' who possess massive experience in the Welfare and Wellbeing arena which our RNA needs to take advantage of! Many of them have 'volunteered' and stepped forward to the RNA's benefit as Area WW Officers offering their experience, advice, and guidance to the Branch Support Officers.

Hopefully, you will find the WW Handbook a useful and informative document and I commend it to you.

Best wishes,

Andy Christie

National Chairman



RNA General Secretary

We are not alone in the naval charity sector and there are other organisations who are better resourced to deal with those in crisis. For example, the RNBT, the Wrens BT and the Naval Children's Charity are only some of the benevolence organisations which are established to support those eligible in our community who are in need. Then there is SSAFA, and hopefully soon RNBT too, who have the trained caseworkers to tap into these benevolence charities as and when needed.

Our role therefore is not to compete with these charities, but instead to operate upstream in support of shipmates, building resilience and helping each other in a comradely way. To that end, it is not just the job of the Branch Welfare Officer, we are all responsible for welfare and wellbeing.

We are a membership organisation, and our members are only part of the organisation because they want to be. All our Branch Welfare Officers are de facto volunteers, and I thank everyone who has stepped up to the plate in this regard within their Branches. I will not hide that trying to improve the provision of Welfare and Wellbeing has been a difficult leadership challenge and societal changes have imposed upon us the necessity of DBS checks and Safeguarding which we cannot ignore. Indeed, we owe it to our membership to ensure that we do a DBS check to ensure we are not appointing someone with an inappropriate criminal record to our support team. And why wouldn't we seek to have more of our number safeguarding trained to ensure that they can better spot the signs in case any of our members, especially our elderly and more vulnerable, are being taken advantage off in some shape or form?

Notwithstanding, the National Council have recognised that any improvements to the provision of Welfare and Wellbeing needs to be a bottom-up initiative and not something imposed from HQ. To address this, we have established a new working group of members who we know are either healthcare professionals in their day jobs or have huge experience in the tactical delivery of welfare provision at the Branch and Area level.

This group has established a structure which is effectively an advice network, tiered by a level of expertise and experience which allows those charged with welfare and wellbeing responsibilities at Branch level to seek advice should they require it. It is all explained in more detail in this handbook.

I urge everyone to lean into this initiative, to continue your good deeds, and take a moment to get to understand your part you are playing, however small you perceive it to be. I therefore commend this publication to you.

Thank you,
Bill Oliphant
General Secretary



This Handbook is one element of a Welfare and Wellbeing support guide created for volunteers in the Royal Naval Association. Think of this Handbook as being the overarching strategy for the Association's Welfare and Wellbeing support, outlining the enduring basic principles behind the strategy.

The Handbook is not just relevant to those who would benefit from support – it is also designed to ensure that our volunteers can also reap the benefits of a sense of wellbeing. Wellbeing is an essential state for all of us.

Undertaking a Welfare and Wellbeing voluntary role within the Royal Naval Association can be a very satisfying and rewarding experience. This is the very ethos of 'Once Navy, Always Navy', and by making yourself available to respond to requests for support, perhaps by providing information, signposting and/or simply putting an arm around the shoulder of a Shipmate, you are ensuring our continued commitment to each other.

Some of you will have years of learned knowledge and experience, which we hope serves to enrich your sense of value coupled with a desire to share this with Shipmates new to the many wellbeing roles through mentoring and guidance. Remember that support for each other is only a phone call or email away – and a problem shared is a solution explored. Some may be reticent to engage because they do not think they have an issue, or they think their issue is insignificant, but no problem, query or concern is too small – and better to deal with an issue early on, before it can become a major stumbling block.

As a registered Charity operating under a Royal Charter, the Royal Naval Association will make every effort to abide by the objects of the Charter relating to Welfare & Wellbeing These are: -

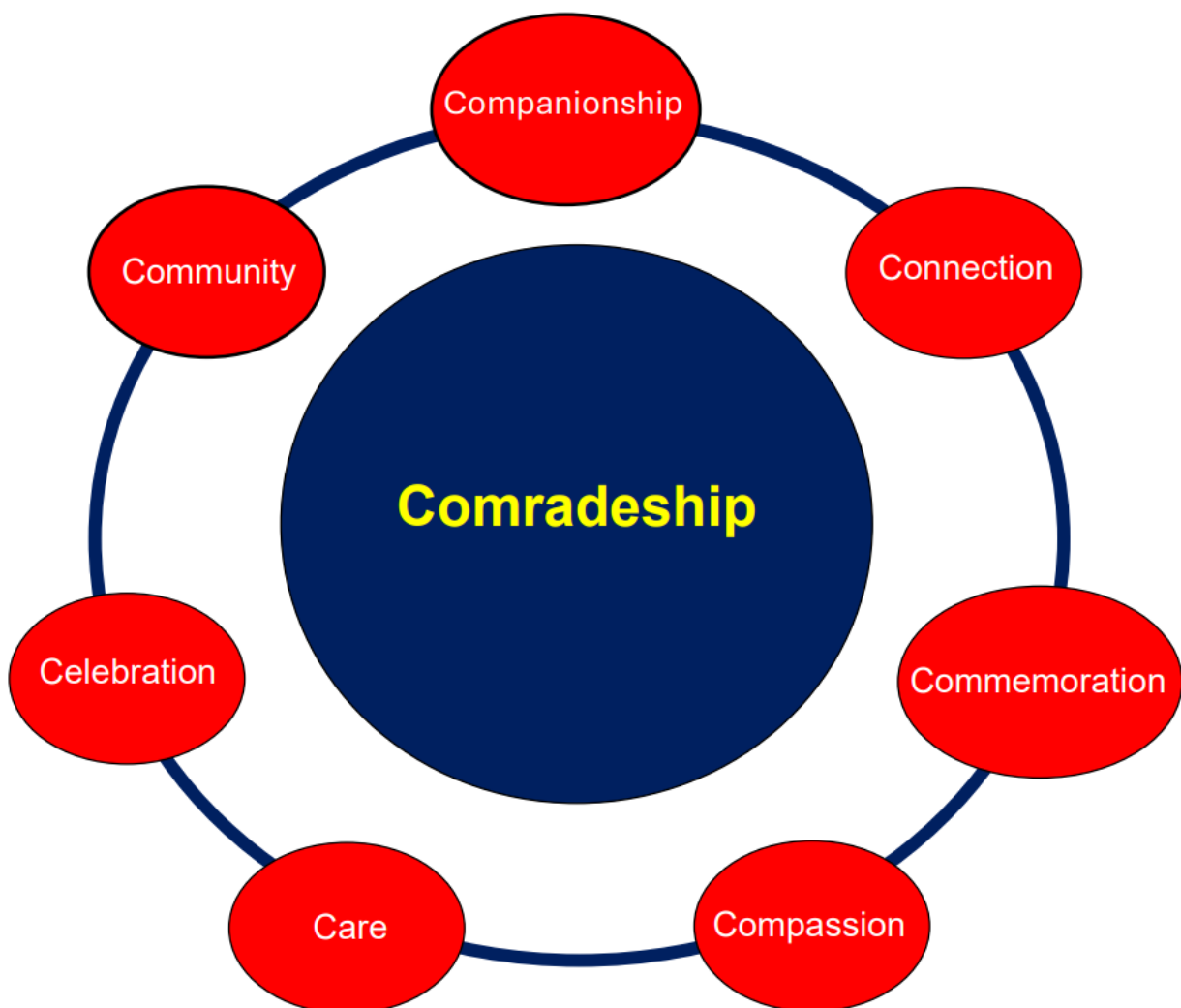
- To further the efficiency of the Service
- To relieve members of the Association who are in conditions of need, hardship, or distress.
- To afford assistance to all serving and former members of the Naval Forces.



Our Values

The Royal Charter outlines our values as, Unity, Loyalty, Patriotism and Comradeship. Of those, Comradeship using modern management speech is our USP¹! We have therefore developed the concept of Comradeship into the 7 components of Comradeship, or the 7C's

The 7C's



¹ Unique Selling Point



Diversity and Inclusion

[20240214-RNA Diversity and Inclusion Policy Statement-EA.docx](#)

The Royal Naval Association strives to be an inclusive and diverse organisation. We recognise the immense pain and devastation caused through historical policies which have long been updated. We are determined to create a safe and diverse space for all our Shipmates within the Royal Naval Association, where their service and support can be celebrated with pride.

We would like to empower and encourage our membership to challenge conversations which threaten diversity, and we stand firmly against any discriminatory views. Anti-discrimination law may include protections for groups or individuals based on sex, age, race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, mental illness or ability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity/expression, sex characteristics, religion, creed, or individual political opinions.

A core Royal Navy value is to have respect for others, from all walks of life, and we expect that our membership reflects this ideal.

What is the difference between Welfare and Wellbeing?

These terms are often used interchangeably, but one way of looking at them is that the provision of welfare – such as formal assistance and support from government and non-government organisations, perhaps through benefits systems, or caring services – has a direct effect on a person's wellbeing, or how they feel about the way their life is going.

Welfare is by no means needed by everybody, but everybody can benefit from wellbeing support which will increase their sense of wellbeing. This can be achieved in a number of ways including support or through self-help.

What is Welfare?

This covers a wide array of social services provided by the state or by a third-party, often charitable organisations for the benefit of citizens, including:

- Mental health, physical health, personal finance, and accommodation.
- It could be to prevent serious risk to health or safety.
- It could necessitate an immediate and urgent intervention.
- Helps community cohesion.



What is Wellbeing?

According to the UK Department of Health (DoH), wellbeing is about feeling good and functioning well and includes aspects such as whether a person is satisfied with their life, whether their emotions are positive and whether they feel their life is meaningful.

Put simply, wellbeing is the state of being comfortable, secure, healthy, and/or happy, enabling a person to cope with the normal stresses and strains of life, to connect with other positively, to work productively and/or contribute to their community. The DoH states that wellbeing can:

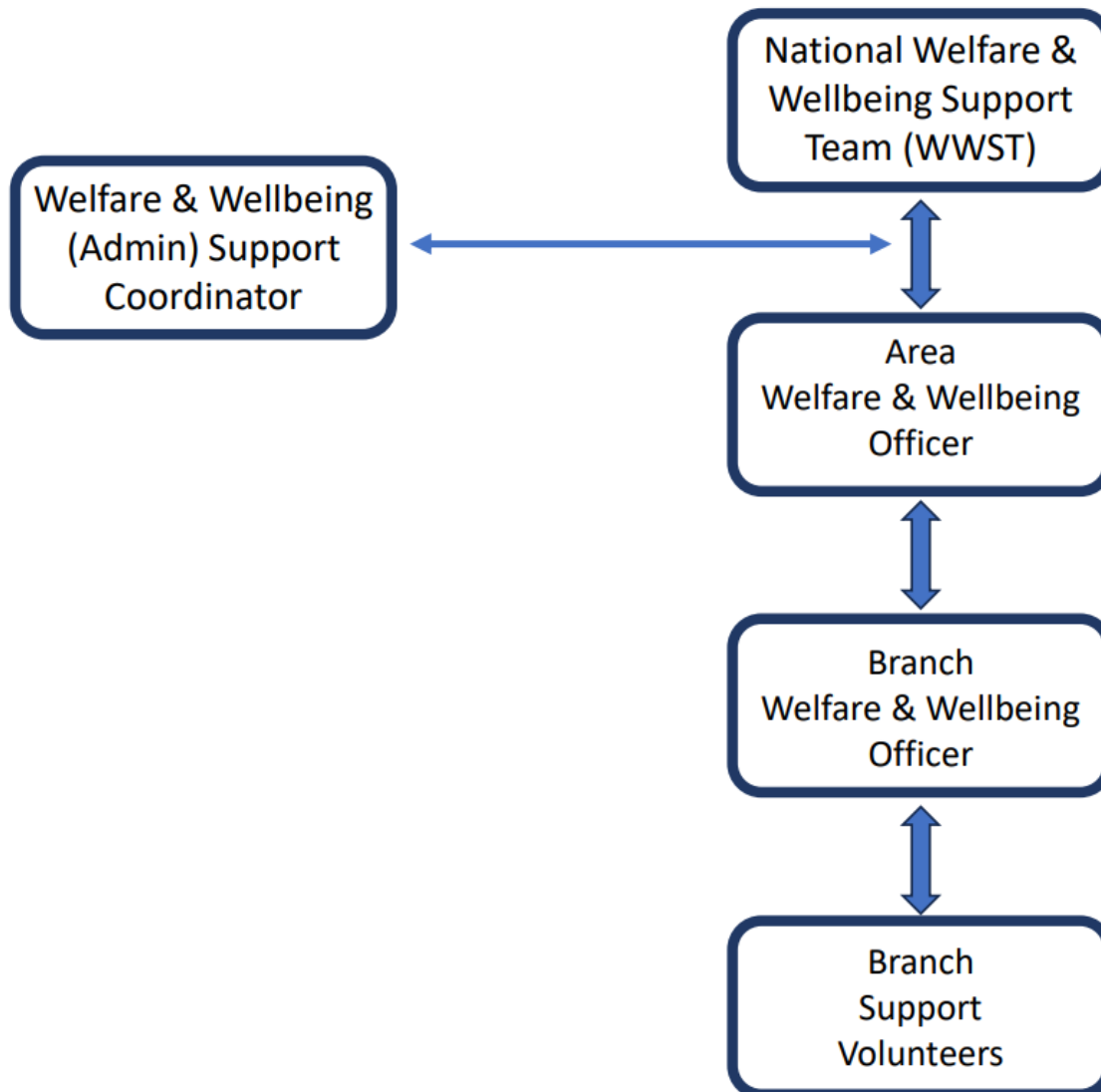
- Add years to life.
- Improve recovery from illness or protect against becoming ill.
- Influence the wellbeing and mental health of those close to us.
- Build mental health resilience.

The RNA Position on Welfare and Wellbeing

The RNA is not structured or resourced to provide financial welfare support to its members but is the eyes and ears to be able to assist those in need, find the required support from partner charities and organisations who are funded to operate in this space, e.g. SSAFA, RBL, RNBT, etc. So, as far as the definition of Welfare support is concerned, the RNA provides a handrailing service to those charities who are equipped to be able to support our members in need but everything we do (lunches, meetings, trips) contributes to improved Wellbeing.



RNA Welfare & Wellbeing Structure



The Welfare and Wellbeing structure is an advice network made up of volunteer shipmates of various skill and experience levels within the Welfare and Wellbeing field. It is not a rank structure however if Branch Welfare and Wellbeing Officers require advice, the concept is that they tap into their Area Welfare and Wellbeing Officers for that advice. The point is, we are very fortunate to have some members who have considerable experience in this field, but the idea is not to overload those individuals with every enquiry. Equally, Central Office is not manned to be able to deal with all Welfare enquiries.

Although this experience exists, it does not mean that there is not a place in our Welfare and Wellbeing organisation for those who just want to help, hence the formation of the Branch Support Volunteer Role.

All roles description can be found on the following pages.



Branch Support Volunteer (BSV) Role Description

Volunteer role:	RNA Branch Support Volunteer (BSV)
Supported by:	Branch Welfare & Wellbeing Officer (BWVO)
Safeguarding	Some Safeguarding knowledge is recommended.
DBS:	Basic DBS may be required if conducting activities such as face-to-face visits
Training:	Training provided where appropriate or requested.
Location:	Home/In Branch

ROLE PURPOSE

Branch Support Volunteer (BSV) is to support the Branch Welfare & Wellbeing Officer (BWVO). Branch Support Volunteers support falls under the following key activities: awareness of local Branch events, phoning shipmates and home & hospital visits. Support known local RNA members and their families in an informal way and to support the Branch Welfare & Wellbeing Officer with identifying those who may require support and/or signposting. This is a role, with no direct engagement from a Welfare perspective, unless at the request of the Branch Welfare & Wellbeing Officer.

PERSONAL QUALITIES AND EXPERIENCE

BSV's should be friendly, and patient and no experience is necessary to undertake this role.

TASKS AND ACTIVITIES

- Shipmates that may require support and inform your BWVO.
- Undertake activities such as calling shipmates, home, or hospital visits.
- Send cards/flowers when necessary to shipmates at the request of the BWVO.
- Complete the necessary record forms to log any support provided.
- Abide by the core values of the RNA.

Home visits, telephone buddies and hospital visits may require a DBS, whereas other community-based activities such as, sending cards/flowers will not.

WHAT WE REQUEST FROM YOU:

- Access to or use of a smartphone and a computer, tablet, or laptop.
- Completion of reporting forms for support provided. (Either online or paper copy)
- To conduct yourself in a way that does not put the reputation of the RNA into disrepute.
- Follow the Data Protection Act 2018
- Follow the Safeguarding Policy
- Follow the Lone Working Policy

IN RETURN, THE RNA WILL

- Provide training relevant to your role.
- Engage with you through newsletters, social media, and other communication tools when appropriate.



Branch Welfare and Wellbeing Officer (BWWO) Role Description

Volunteer role:	RNA Branch Welfare & Wellbeing Officer (BWWO)
Supported by:	AWWO and WWSC
Safeguarding:	Level 1
DBS:	Enhanced
Training:	Induction training and additional training provided as required
Location:	Home/In Branch

ROLE PURPOSE

The role of Branch Welfare/Wellbeing Officer is to support both full and associate RNA members, and their families who are experiencing difficulties. Where the Branch is a small Branch, it is recommended that the Branch Secretary coordinates any Welfare requests.

The needs of our members can vary, and you will need to act as an effective sign poster, helping our members to access the right support at the right time, for example financial support, bereavement, mental health, legal services, pensions, benefits etc.

PERSONAL QUALITIES AND EXPERIENCE

Branch Welfare & Wellbeing Officers should be friendly and patient, with an understanding of the needs of both older veterans and their families, as well as current serving and transitioning personnel and their families.

You must be empathetic and demonstrate strong listening and communication skills. Some experience of welfare and wellbeing is preferred, and an understanding of the Armed Forces would be preferred.

Volunteers must be willing to work within guidelines and have an understanding of Safeguarding and Data Protection to enable you to fulfil your role safely, effectively and most importantly, within the legal requirements and have an understanding of Diversity and Inclusion and be respectful of the diverse membership that the RNA has with which full training and support will be provided.

In undertaking the role of BWWO you understand that you are formally acting as a representative of the RNA and as such you understand the boundaries when communicating with members, their families, and members of the public and the implications that this may have.



TASKS AND ACTIVITIES

Give a Welfare & Wellbeing summary at the monthly branch meeting.

- If any branch members are unusually missing, contact the member by telephone to see if they are ok or need assistance.
- If help is required, help branch members and their families to get the support they need, through proactively communicating support available to your branch members signposting, interacting, and building professional relationships with members.
- Complete the RNA reporting Form and log support provided.
- Attend the necessary Welfare & Wellbeing training and meetings requested to enable you to support your Branch members.
- Work with other branches/areas and the Wellbeing Delivery Teams to share good practice.
- Liaison with BSV's before they carry out any task.
- Your first point of contact is your AWWO.

WHAT WE REQUEST FROM YOU:

- To ensure you get the most out of your volunteering role with us, we ask that you:
- Have access to or use of a Smartphone and a computer, tablet, or laptop.
- Have an RNA BWWO Email address.
- Adhere to the policies, procedures, and guidelines of the organisation, including being proactive in your approach to health and safety.
- To conduct yourself in a way that does not put the reputation of the RNA into disrepute.
- To always maintain members confidentiality and treat our data, sensitive information, and internal communications in a confidential manner (unless in situations where you are presented with a safeguarding concern, at which point you must inform the member that you are raising a concern).
- You will need to have an understanding of Safeguarding and Data Protection to enable you to fulfil your role safely, effectively and most importantly, within the legal requirements and have an understanding of Diversity and Inclusion and be respectful of the diverse membership that the RNA has with which full training will be provided.
- Attend any training and support meetings designed to enhance your skills as BWWO.
- In undertaking the role of Welfare & Wellbeing Officer you understand that you are formally acting as a representative of the RNA and as such you understand the boundaries when communicating with members, their families, and members of the public and the implications that this may have.
- Let us know promptly if you are concerned about anything or if something has gone wrong.



IN RETURN, THE RNA WILL

Provide support in the following areas

- **Induction**

All of our Welfare & Wellbeing officers will have an induction and relevant training tailored to the role they are going to undertake for the RNA.

- **Training**

We want to make sure you are able to conduct your Welfare & Wellbeing role safely, confidently and to the best of your abilities so we may occasionally ask you to complete some training.

- **Support**

We will support you to conduct your role appropriately and effectively. This may be in person or on the phone, depending on your location and role. Please do feedback any problems, concerns or learning points in a timely manner so that any potential issues can be resolved, and you can remain positive and confident in your role.



Area Welfare and Wellbeing Officer (AAWO) Role Description

Volunteer role:	Area Welfare & Wellbeing Officer (AWWO)
Supported by:	National Welfare & Wellbeing Support Team (NWWST)
Safeguarding	Level 2 or above
DBS:	Enhanced
Training:	Induction training and additional training provided as required
Location:	Home/In Area

ROLE PURPOSE

The role of Area Welfare & Wellbeing Officer is to support Branch Welfare & Wellbeing Officers.

The needs of our members can vary, and with your specialist areas of expertise, you will be the first point of contact for Branch Welfare & Wellbeing Officers (BWWO) who have a complex case or query that you may be able to assist or advise on.

PERSONAL QUALITIES AND EXPERIENCE

It would be preferred that a AWWO is someone who has previous experience in an RNA area or branch BWWO role, or someone who has gained experience within other agencies such as SSAFA, RBL etc. We will however fully support someone who is willing to undertake training in furtherance to their role and support to the BWWO's.

Area Welfare & Wellbeing Officers should be friendly and patient, with an understanding of the needs of both older veterans and their families, as well as current serving and transitioning personnel and their families.

You must be empathetic and demonstrate strong listening and communication skills. and an understanding of the Armed Forces would be preferred.

AWWO's must be willing to work within guidelines and have an understanding of Safeguarding and Data Protection to enable you to fulfil your role safely, effectively and most importantly, within the legal requirements and have an understanding of Diversity and Inclusion and be respectful of the diverse membership that the RNA has with which full training and support will be provided.

In undertaking the role of AWWO you understand that you are formally acting as a representative of the RNA and as such you understand the boundaries when communicating with members, their families, and members of the public and the implications that this may have.



TASKS AND ACTIVITIES

- Act as a first point of contact for BWWO's who may require advice and guidance.
- Your first point of contact will be the Central Office, Welfare/Wellbeing Support Coordinator.
- Attend Welfare & Wellbeing training and meetings requested to enable you to enhance your skills and support your Area and the RNA.
- Maintain regular contact with BWWO's preferably by telephone or face to face, to ensure their wellbeing and your approachability.
- Research and ensure all BWWO's receive any relevant paperwork, updates, and changes to legislation.
- Consult all BWWO's on any new requirements or directives that may affect them to get their opinions before new items are put into place.
- Hold regular training/information meetings with BWWO's This can be at e.g. Area meetings or using the virtual tools; Facebook, WhatsApp, TEAMS and Zoom etc.
- Keep up to date with policies and share best practice.
- Abide by the core values of the RNA.
- Complete the necessary record forms to log any support provided.
- Attend meetings at National (with other AWWO's) or CO level. Build professional relationships with all Wellbeing delivery teams and support the RNA in ensuring a first-class level of support is available to all our members.
- Act as personal WWO to any Riders Branch members residing in your area.

WHAT WE REQUEST FROM YOU:

- To ensure you get the most out of your volunteering role with us, we ask that you:
- Have access to or use of a computer, tablet, or laptop.
- Have an RNA AWWO Email address.
- Adhere to the policies, procedures, and guidelines of the organisation, including being proactive in your approach to health and safety.
- To conduct yourself in a way that does not put the reputation of the RNA into disrepute.
- To always maintain members confidentiality and treat our data, sensitive information, and internal communications in a confidential manner (unless in situations where you are presented with a safeguarding concern, at which point you must inform the member that you are raising a concern).
- You will need to have an understanding of Safeguarding and Data Protection to enable you to fulfil your role safely, effectively and most importantly, within the legal requirements and have an understanding of Diversity and Inclusion and be respectful of the diverse membership that the RNA has with which full training will be provided.
- Let us know promptly if you are concerned about anything or if something has gone wrong.



IN RETURN, THE RNA WILL

Provide support in the following areas

- **Induction**

All of our Welfare & Wellbeing officers will have an induction and relevant training tailored to the role they are going to undertake for the RNA.

- **Training**

We want to make sure you are able to conduct your Welfare & Wellbeing role safely, confidently and to the best of your abilities so we may occasionally ask you to complete some training.

- **Support**

We will support you to conduct your role appropriately and effectively. This may be in person or on the phone, depending on your location and role. Please do feedback any problems, concerns or learning points in a timely manner so that any potential issues can be resolved, and you can remain positive and confident in your role.



Welfare and Wellbeing Support Coordinator (WWSC) Role Description

Employed role:	Welfare and Wellbeing Support Coordinator
Supported by:	National Welfare & Wellbeing Support Team
Safeguarding	Level 2 or above
DBS:	Enhanced DBS is essential to the role
Location:	Central Office/Home

ROLE DESCRIPTION

- Work with and be part of the Welfare and Wellbeing Support Team (WWST).
- Meet on a regular basis with the WWST.
- Keeping the RNA Welfare officer's data base up to date, this to include ensuring WWOs are in date for such things as DBS, Safeguarding and training etc.
- Sending "Welcome" letters to new WWO's to include RNA cards and handbook once training has taken place.
- General Welfare & Wellbeing communications to Area/Branch WWOs
- Act as a central point of contact for Area and Branch WWOs.
- Act as a central point of contact for Welfare enquires and sign posting/handrailing to Area Welfare officers or Branches.
- Help to deliver RNA Welfare Training at Area and Branch level.
- Visit Areas as and when required.
- Continually ensure that Area and Branches are kept informed to any updates or changes within the RNA.



National Welfare/Wellbeing Support Team (NWWST)

Volunteer role:	National Welfare and Wellbeing Support Team
Safeguarding	Level 2 or above
DBS:	Enhanced
Location:	Central Office/Home

-The NWWST are a small group of Shipmates from Branches and Areas that have full working knowledge of the guidelines and activities for Area Welfare/Wellbeing Officers (AWWO) and Branch Welfare/Wellbeing Officers (BWWO).

The NWWST are shipmates with experience in their professional occupations or experience as volunteers in the Welfare and Wellbeing sector.

They work collaboratively with Central Office to maintain awareness of activities and trends within the Welfare and Wellbeing environment, and to act upon them accordingly.

They will be available to give advice related to welfare or benevolence queries from Area Welfare Officers, reporting to the AMC on a quarterly basis, identifying key activities and trends of interest.



Safeguarding & DBS

Safeguarding Policy - Awaiting approval by the National Council 13 Dec 24

Position	Safeguarding level	DBS Level
National Welfare and Wellbeing Support Team	2 or above	Enhanced
Welfare and Wellbeing Support Coordinator	2 or above	Enhanced
Area Welfare & Wellbeing Officers	2 or above	Enhanced
Branch Welfare & Wellbeing Officers	1	Enhanced
Branch Support Volunteers	Some Safeguarding Knowledge.	Basic - maybe required

The National Welfare and Wellbeing Support Team will be required to have a minimum of a level 2 Safeguarding qualification. All Area Welfare and Wellbeing Officers will be required to undertake safeguarding level 2 training, while Branch Welfare and Wellbeing Officers and Branch Support Volunteers should gain level 1 Safeguarding in line with their role and responsibilities. Area & Branch Welfare & Wellbeing officers will be required to have Enhanced DBS and Branch Wellbeing Support Volunteers will be required to have a Basic DBS.

Welfare and Wellbeing training, which includes Safeguarding, along with monitoring of those who require training or refresher training will be the responsibility of and coordinated by the Welfare and Wellbeing Support Coordinator.



Lone Working Guidance

[20231115-Lone Working Policy Nov 23-GSO - Final.docx](#)

Lone working can be defined as any situation, or location, in which someone works without close or direct supervision; without a colleague nearby or is out of sight or earshot of another colleague. Lone workers face a variety of hazards.

Lone workers can be vulnerable and at increased risk of physical or verbal abuse and harassment from the shipmates they visit or their relatives.

It is recommended that a few simple steps are followed.

- Ensure someone knows where you are going, timings and contact numbers.
- Ensure you have a mobile phone, and it is fully charged.
- Does your own health give you any concern, think, are you fit and able to carry out the task.
- Are there any concerns about the person that you are visiting? For example, their mental fitness and wellbeing, animals or similar. If so, consider meeting in a public place.
- Are there any concerns about the location of the visit, think about the area that you are visiting, for example time of day, known drug dealing/gang areas. If so, think about changing the location of the meeting.
- Only take and carry what you need.
- At the point you feel uncomfortable finish the meeting and leave.

In General

As a Welfare and Wellbeing volunteer, you may get a request for support from a Shipmate who is not a Branch member, or even a member of the RNA. In such circumstances, remember – Once Navy, Always Navy, and offer whatever support you can, encouraging them to join the RNA.

Completion of initial safeguarding and induction will entitle each volunteer to be issued with an identity card showing that the holder is representing the RNA in a Welfare capacity. This should be produced when conducting a visit. The card should be returned to the Branch Secretary and destroyed when the member is no longer acting as BWO.

The primary task of the volunteer is to explore the avenues of support available for members when requested, signposting, and referring individuals to relevant local or national support agencies and charities, and to assist in the resolution of an issue whilst maintaining safe volunteering practices. Remember that you should not just think in terms of military charities when seeking support – civilian charities or local authorities may be a good option as they often have expertise which is not available in the military sector, and many issues affecting veterans are not veteran-specific.



It therefore follows that the BWWO assists in any issue of need and distress occurring amongst their Branch members and, when possible, will assist serving and former Royal Naval personnel and their families living within the immediate area of the Branch.

Should a query come from a Serving person, or their family member and you are not able to signpost relatively quickly, or the matter is complex then you should encourage them to seek support from their Divisional Officer and/or the Royal Navy Family People Support (RN FPS) service on 0800 145 6088. Noting that family members can access support from RN FPS directly themselves.

Driving

If you use a vehicle to visit anyone in connection of the Welfare & Wellbeing role that you are undertaking, it is your responsibility to ensure that the vehicle that you use is Taxed and has a current MOT. You must also ensure that you have the correct, and current

drivers licence along with an appropriate insurance policy in place. The Royal Naval Association will not be responsible for the insurance of any vehicle and cannot reimburse any cost incurred.

You should not take any person that you may be supporting/visiting out in your vehicle; should you do so, then you will become personally liable in the event of an accident.

Legal Assistance / Responsibility.

No Royal Naval Association Welfare & Wellbeing Volunteer/Officer should take on any legal responsibility for any shipmate/beneficiary. This includes taking on, for example "lasting power of attorney" for either Health & Welfare or Property & Financial affairs.

Financial Help

Identifying the need for financial assistance requires key skills in gathering protected personal information and is therefore a field of specialisation in which we would not expect our volunteers to immerse themselves. Following processes and ensuring data protection and safe storage of personal information is critical to ensuring compliance with current GDPR legislation. Onward signposting and referral are supported by these processes, such as obtaining individual agreement to share.

Individuals Wellbeing (including that of volunteers)

As part of a caring community your wellbeing is at the centre of our commitment to you and to each other. Good mental and physical health is important to help us all live a happier life, and a fallen person cannot help another stand – you should ensure that your wellbeing is assured before you can help others seek the same sense of fulfilment. Hopefully, the following guidance will assist not only you but those to whom you will be offering support. It is important to understand yourself and your own personal wellbeing, including the stresses and strains that might impact on you before you can help others.



Amongst those who could offer you support are:

- Peer groups
- Area Welfare/Wellbeing Officer
- Other Branch Welfare/Wellbeing Officers
- Welfare & Wellbeing Support Coordinator at Central Office
- The National Welfare & Wellbeing Support Team
- And of course, your fellow Shipmates and family members

Experts in the field identify different aspects of wellbeing which makes it easier to identify areas which could be supported – physical health, mental health, social interactions, financial wellbeing and work-life balance are all key factors in a person's overall sense of wellbeing.

At the most basic level, there are some simple steps that anyone can take to ensure their wellbeing:

Be Active

Evidence shows that physical activity improves general health and mental wellbeing. This may not mean you have to go the gym – walking, swimming, and cycling are great for everyday basic exercise, even a spot of gardening or a bit of dancing (perhaps while no one is watching!) can all contribute to better overall health. Have a sing while you are in the shower or alone in your car. After all of this activity, remember that rest is just as important as exercise, especially sleep which is an important factor in good health.

Eat Well

The better the fuel on which you run, the better you will be able to function. A diet which is balanced for your needs will help you maintain health and fitness. Just as importantly, avoid the 'wrong' stuff, and get to know your body – keep it maintained, and understand it enough to take action when things are not 'right.'

Keep Active Mentally

Do not let yourself go stale. Try something new or revisit an old hobby or pastime. Seek out courses that will keep you mentally stimulated. Keep asking questions and add to your understanding of the world around you. Challenge yourself and set yourself goals or targets to maintain your interest, which can all help to increase your confidence as well.



Mindfulness

Be aware of the world around you, and acknowledge your own thoughts, emotions, and feelings. Take notice of the things that perhaps passed you by before, and enjoy the moment, whatever you are doing whether walking to the shops, preparing dinner, riding on a bus, or looking out of your window. Give yourself the opportunity to feel and understand your emotions, and be honest with yourself about how you feel, and why. This can help you enjoy a positive approach to life and help your spiritual wellbeing – your sense of purpose and fulfilment with what you do with your life. Spiritual wellbeing does not mean taking up yoga (though no reason why you should not!) – it could be as simple as taking a walk in the countryside and soaking up your brush with Mother Nature.

Community

Connect with those around you, your family, or friends, or neighbours, or colleagues. They are part of your community, so make sure you are part of it too! It does not mean you have to rush about signing up for groups and activities to fill your time – it is all about building meaningful connections with others, supporting them, and communicating with them, all of which can create a rewarding sense of self-worth and put a smile on your face.

Occupational Wellbeing

For those working, you should be seeking that work-life balance that means you achieve a sense of fulfilment in the workplace while maintaining clear boundaries between career and home life. Ideally you should be working towards goals that satisfy you and help your personal development, while also living your best life outside the place of work. And, of course, the same principles equally apply to anyone our volunteers come into contact within the course of their activities.

Loneliness

Research from the Armed Forces Covenant Trust - “The strong sense of identity in the armed forces can both protect against loneliness and make it more likely. When people leave the forces, they can be a real bond for others who have been in the services that can still resonate decades after people have left. This can provide people with strong networks after their service. On top of this, being in the armed forces gives people increased access to support from both charities and the public sector.”

Loneliness or social isolation is a problem that is gaining increasing attention in the UK – indeed we have been acutely aware of this within our Association particularly during the challenging times of the pandemic.



Also, be aware, loneliness is not something reserved for the elderly or the bereaved. It can be a broken relationship, or simply, as a veteran, dislocation from the Navy we love. It comes in all shapes and forms.

As an Association we often hear about a Shipmate who we understand to be lonely, and many of us will get how debilitating this experience can be for an individual – indeed, the chances are we may have experienced it ourselves.

Loneliness is an unpleasant emotional response to perceived isolation and can be described as a social pain. Social connections can support the overcoming of loneliness, but this is not always an easy and straightforward task.

Loneliness overlaps, and yet is distinct from, solitude. Solitude is the state of being apart from others, but not everyone who experiences solitude feels lonely, and conversely someone may feel lonely in a crowd – it is very much down to the perception of the individual, which can make it a difficult issue to address. Whilst loneliness itself is not an illness, or a mental condition, it can be a major factor in both our mental and physical wellbeing.

Addressing Loneliness

Because loneliness is a subjective experience, the routes out of it will differ from one person to the next. Different people need different types of relationships to sustain them, and there is no correct 'dose' for friendship or companionship. If you become aware of someone who is experiencing loneliness your first thought should not be to 'rescue' – this is easier said than done.

Being aware of your availability should be at the forefront of your mind, remembering your wellbeing. Comradeship is the basis of inclusion – offering a Shipmate the opportunity for involvement, a steer towards a drop-in centre or a veterans' breakfast club might provide the spark of interest that helps bring about change in their life.

It is worth developing a broad knowledge of what is available within your area – there will be a wide range of social activities to meet most people's needs, not all necessarily connected to the RNA or to the military or veterans' community. Interests should be complementary and varied including spiritual, practical, educational, vocational, conversational, and listening. Being open and inquisitive as to what set of circumstances is affecting a Shipmate's current state can help you to understand them. Have they recently experienced bereavement? Have family members moved location, making connections more challenging?



Gently enquiring about how things are and how things used to be may give you some thoughts on how to offer support and signpost effectively. Nobody expects you to solve problems, the RNA Wellbeing organisation is not the fourth emergency service but being compassionate and community-minded can make all the difference to someone's life.

If needed, you can start the ball rolling with a view to connecting that person with the organisations and expertise that are better-placed and COULD solve problems.

Here are some questions you might naturally find yourself asking someone, or you may not as they can be potentially tricky but if you feel the opportunity presents itself you might be surprised at the responses whether that is to confirm or rule out loneliness:

Do you feel lonely?

- Very lonely
- Feel lonely sometimes.
- Never lonely

How often do you feel lonely?

- All the time.
- Some of the time

The following are suggestions to help someone who may be experiencing loneliness.

Connecting with others

- Catching up with old friends or Shipmates
- Investing time in new connections, interests, or pastimes
- Little things can make a difference.
- Connect online.
- Consider support and services.
- Do not keep it to yourself.

Things a person can do if they prefer to manage alone.

- Plan their week to include things they enjoy.
- Spend time outdoors.
- Focus on the good things in life.
- Look after themselves, see the individual Wellbeing section above.

There is a Campaign to End Loneliness and their website www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk has some great articles for further reading.



Comradeship in the RNA

Personal circumstances can affect us all in different ways, and often the most challenging to ask for help with, are experiences of social isolation and loneliness. The unique position available to the Association is to provide comradeship and to encourage those who are perhaps experiencing loneliness to join the activities of their local Branch. By welcoming people into a community that shares a Naval or military background and therefore better understands some of the unique circumstances that veterans can experience, can be truly life changing. Befriending is a vital activity which can have such positive impact and supports overall wellbeing.

Conclusion

Perhaps the main thing to remember at the outset is: take a moment. Clear heads will help people work through their issues and identify the best path ahead, with the support of specialists in various associated fields, such as benefits, pensions, debt, and investment.

No one expects a member of the RNA Welfare and Wellbeing organisation to know their way round the tax system or the small print of UK benefits – but through effective signposting you could help someone take their first steps towards resolving a financial issue.

A wide range of accessible organisations exist to help people with financial matters, and just a reminder although there are military specialists, it may be appropriate to point somebody in the direction of a civilian organisation such as Citizens Advice or Moneyhelper if the matter does not hinge on specifically military factors.

To close, you are reminded that whilst you are not supporting Shipmates in a casework capacity, you are key to ensuring Shipmates are supported effectively and in a timely manner. Your input is invaluable to contributing to positive outcomes for Shipmates who finds themselves in need, hardship, or distress. Together our intention is to stay safe, be well and maintain and uphold the ethos of Once Navy, Always Navy and to mirror the intent of the Armed Forces Covenant Trust – to do no harm.

And please remember, you are part of an advice network. If you are not sure of the next step, please do not be so proud as to not reach up to the next level of expertise for that advice. As a BWO, get to know your Area WO. No-one will think any less of you for taking advice, indeed, good comms between the levels of the RNA Welfare/Wellbeing network are essential to the good working of the system. Please use it.

Thank you for your time, your commitment to your Shipmates and please be assured that you are deeply valued.



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Notes