



Raytheon UK

Operation CONNECT

Within days of the COVID-19 lockdown being implemented across the country, the Royal Air Forces Association (RAFA) revolutionised its services to meet the needs of the RAF community, with support from Raytheon UK.

Operation CONNECT was born using the combined forces of RAFA's branches, employees, and volunteers, both new and existing. It comprises four large-scale emergency projects designed to address issues faced by members of the RAF community.

One is Project OUTREACH, a telephone outreach service, staffed by volunteers, contacting over 30,000 RAF veterans and their loved ones, who are in higher risk groups and have therefore been self-isolating or shielding. The outreach service checks on their welfare, alerts them to the support services in place and offers them ongoing telephone friendship from a regular volunteer.

As part of their new corporate responsibility programme - Forward Steps - Raytheon UK's employees joined forces with 270 RAFA branches and over 280 other volunteers to make

welfare checks and befriending calls.

"We are very grateful to Raytheon UK for providing volunteers to the Association at such a critical time," said Air Marshal Sir Baz North, President of the RAF Association. "Their volunteers are ensuring no member of the RAF community goes without support when they need it most."

Each volunteer undertakes a specially-designed online training course, which ensures they are equipped with the skills they need when handling these calls and is assigned a volunteer coordinator, who provides ongoing



100-year-old Louisa Neale is helped by the RAF Association



Raytheon UK volunteer Kitty making calls as part of Project OUTREACH

support and gives advice on complex cases, so that individuals with specialist needs can benefit from the welfare support services provided by RAFA.

One of Raytheon UK's volunteers is Kitty, a Lead Digital Business Analyst. Having been a Special Constable with the Metropolitan Police for 11 years, Kitty is no stranger to providing support to her local community. She has been involved in crime prevention initiatives, working with elderly and vulnerable people. Her professionalism, courage and commitment saw her rewarded with the Metropolitan Police Borough Commander Commendation, recognising her contribution to the community.

"I am very grateful to be able to help RAF veterans, who are vulnerable and could become lonely and isolated during the coronavirus outbreak, as many of them are elderly and shielding," said Kitty. "RAFA is a fantastic organisation providing vital welfare assistance to the veteran community, and I hope to be able to apply my previous experience to the telephone befriender initiative as part of Operation CONNECT."

The calls that volunteers are making as part of Project OUTREACH aim to identify those who are particularly lonely

or isolated. As a result, to date, around 1,000 individuals have requested and been assigned a dedicated regular befriending volunteer, such as Kitty.

"When face-to-face contact – the essence of our support for the RAF community – was suddenly no longer possible, we immediately implemented plans, which allowed us to continue the majority of our normal welfare operations," said Nick Bunting, Secretary General of the RAF Association. "But we knew this wouldn't be enough; we needed to do more to support

those who would be most affected by lockdown. So we launched Operation CONNECT, and very soon we found some truly desperate levels of need."

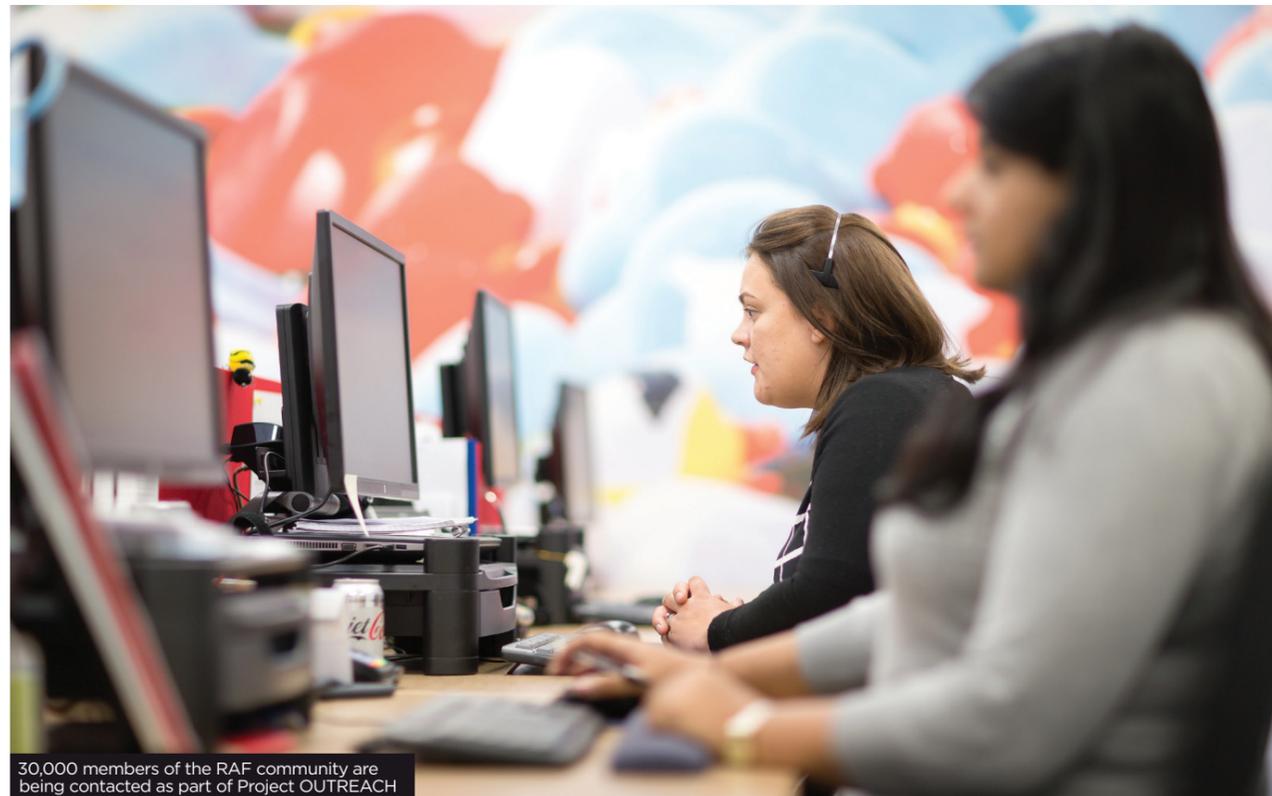
The situations that the outreach volunteers encounter vary hugely. One volunteer recalled their experience: "It was a pleasure talking to Mr W. We spoke about the Second World War and he told me so much I didn't know about. I'm phoning him again next week and looking forward to the phone call." However, not all calls are plain sailing and more challenging situations can arise. "Mrs M had had a fall – the ambulance crew were with her," explained another volunteer. "They checked her over and advised no major

concerns, but she asked me to phone her again later to check that her symptoms had not changed or worsened."

All the work volunteer befrienders do is crucial to supporting those who are less fortunate. It is also making a real difference to members of the RAF community deeply affected by the pandemic.

Jeff Lewis, Chief Executive and Managing Director of Raytheon UK, said: "We are proud of our long-standing relationship with the Armed Forces and veterans, and are delighted to support the Royal Air Forces Association through our partnership on Operation CONNECT. As part of our Forward Steps programme, Raytheon UK is focused on helping to support those that need it most."

"We thank RAFA for all the work they are doing to support our veterans at this unprecedented time and hope our partnership helps those most at risk."



30,000 members of the RAF community are being contacted as part of Project OUTREACH

"Really impressed with the befriending service. The befriender my father has couldn't be nicer. He's so joyful when he's had communication with him, it's a weight off our shoulders knowing that there's someone else who cares about him"

Phil Greig

RAF Association

If your constituents are part of the RAF community and could benefit from regular telephone friendship calls, please contact opconnect@rafa.org.uk. To find out how you can join Raytheon UK's volunteers in supporting the RAF Association's Operation CONNECT, visit www.rafa.org.uk/operationconnect

Further information about Raytheon UK's Forward Steps programme is available at <http://www.raytheon.co.uk/ourcompany/responsibility>