

## BOWRA Foundation and Military Veterans Article

At the end of August 2022, during a chance conversation about how Bournemouth Bowling Club could support less able people to get out in the sunshine and enjoy some very gentle exercise, one of our sponsors (Lester Bruny Wealth Management) suggested we contact Mark BOWRA who started the BOWRA Foundation for anyone who has suffered a stroke or brain injury. Please look up Mark under the "[bowra-foundation.org](http://bowra-foundation.org)" to see his story and why he started the foundation. We also have the linked Military Veterans group (Mark is ex-military) who also need extra help to enjoy the sport.

We invited Mark, and a couple of colleagues to come and try their hand at bowling to see if it was suitable for their weekly group activities. They absolutely loved it. We completed a risk assessment for this special group, we are all DBS cleared and covered safeguarding ready for them to join us. In the last few weeks of the season we had about a dozen participants and Military Vets (we call them all the BOWRA buddies) join us for several sessions. During the winter of 2022/23 the group then started bi-weekly sessions at the Dolphin Indoor BC (Poole) under the guidance of Ken Joy.

In the winter when our greens are closed - we convert our upstairs members lounge into indoor curling - and we have made a few adaptations to the access and if the BOWRA buddies are not at the Dolphin - then they come to us to join the curling league.

In the 2023 Summer season the numbers increased to anything between 15 and 30 depending on who could get transport, but it quickly became clear that we needed to have the special disability wheelchairs for the green. We managed to borrow one from Bannister Park and this worked well, except we needed two. The group come bi-weekly, have lunch and as long as the weather is good enjoy between 1.5 and 2 hours bowling every other Wednesday. So at the end of the season I started contacting anyone who might be able to donate or pay for the two wheelchairs that I needed to support this very active group.

Bush Hill Bowls - came up trumps with one in exchange for advertising on our greens, site and website. They then offered us the second one and Gales Solicitors (another of our regular sponsors) and Lester Brunt paid half each for the second one.

Our summer season kicked off on the 1st May with about 20 participants and on May 15th 2024 the weather was kind and Jerry from Bush Hill Bowls brought the two "Bowls Royce" chairs down to be presented to the club. Mark Bowra MBE accepted the chairs on our behalf and they were given a very good test by the buddies. Once they were tired - tea/coffee and home made cakes were provided - which were thoroughly enjoyed by all.

We have bi-weekly sessions and we have regular club members to help (some of which are ex-military or have suffered a stroke). Whilst our buddies are in recovery they cannot play for long (9-10 ends usually) and need help with placing mats/recovering woods etc. Everyone enjoys the sessions and some of our own members, who are now having difficulty in playing regular games are included. The camaraderie and obvious enjoyment that our buddies get is just fabulous.

For Bournemouth Bowling Club, this is the best way to give something back to the community, and a stroke can happen at any time to anyone and you have no idea if its going to be you.

We are concerned that there are a lot of people in society who have experienced a stroke or brain injury and are sitting at home thinking their life as they knew it is gone. But there are new things they can try - like bowling with the right help.

Our moto is "Its fun, in the sun and you don't know until you have a go" and we welcome everyone to our club.