

Turning the corner on the road to recovery; woodturning for wellbeing

Improving your wellbeing doesn't have to be about running a marathon, eating vegetables all day long or meditating for hours. Sometimes it's just about finding new ways to focus and relax; learning how to be your best.

The Help for Heroes Recovery Centre in Colchester has started offering their beneficiaries woodturning sessions. What was originally planned as a pilot once a month has turned into 3 - 4 sessions a month due to its success; nearly 100 people have attended so far with a handful of beneficiaries returning every session.

The sessions are guided by members of the [Colchester Woodturners Club](#); all giving up their time for free in order to teach interested veterans how to turn wood effectively. They even bring along their own lathes and other equipment to ensure the best experience possible. The group have been running since 1996 and meet once a month at St Johns Church in Colchester where they often have demonstrations from well-known woodturners. It was a natural step for the group to work with Help for Heroes as they all have family connections to the military.

Alan Essam, Club Treasurer and Events Coordinator, said: *"The beauty of woodturning is that anyone can take part; no matter what age, sex or ability they are. We even once had a gentleman attend with his guide dog. We find that with every session people's self-assurance increases and they stretch their abilities; moving from making pens which takes 20 minutes to jewelry boxes and goblets which takes much longer. Those who once felt quite isolated now engage more with the rest of the group and it's increased their confidence to return to work"*.

Melvin White from Colchester, beneficiary of Help for Heroes, started attending the Recovery Centre 3 years ago. The 62 year old, originally from Leicester, served in the Royal Anglians and subsequently the Corps of Army Music. After 30 years of touring in places like Germany, America, Belize, Turkey and Israel an old back injury and problems which Melvin developed with his knees forced him to retire from his position as Band Sergeant Major. Melvin has been attending the woodturning sessions since they began.

"I did woodturning when I was in school but never really finished anything. It's very rewarding to make something useful and be able to take it home. If I'd been introduced to it earlier then I might have found a new career path. Woodturning helps improve my wellbeing as I find working with the wood quite therapeutic. It also helps reduce anxieties as when working on the lathe you have to concentrate very hard in order to not make a mistake. This focus means that all other worries go out the window in that moment".

A group of beneficiaries, with the help of Colchester Woodturners Group, are now working together to make a chess set for the Recovery Centre. Melvin White commented: *"The chess set will be larger than normal so that those with prosthetic arms can grab the pieces without difficulty and if they're knocked then they won't fall over as easily. It's nice to be able to give something back to those who have helped us"*.

Chavasse VC House in Colchester is one of four Help for Heroes Recovery Centres which aims to inspire, enable and support those who are wounded, injured or sick while serving our country. It encourages people like Melvin to lead active, independent and fulfilling lives while also supporting their loved ones. With an adaptive gym, an award winning reflective garden (Hope on the Horizon), a Support Hub made up of multiple charities and other organisations, a psychological well-being suite, en-suite bedrooms, family rooms and a creative studio the Centre has been specially designed to offer the very best recovery environment.

Colchester Woodturning Group would like to thank Thoroughgood Timber near Colchester who have donated wood, Robert Sorby who has donated pen making equipment and DJ Evans of Bury-St-Edmunds who have donated materials.

If you're serving or veteran wounded, injured or sick and in need of support to help you Be Your Best, visit Help for Heroes' [Get Support](#) pages. Did you know that you can also help raise vital funds for us or volunteer your time at events? To find out more visit Help for Heroes' [Give Support](#) pages.

ENDS



Melvin White



Left to right: Con O'Neill, Alan Essam, Dave Errington and Alan Hicks.



Left to right: Alan Essam and Melvin White



Some of the pens made by Chavasse VC House beneficiaries

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Notes to editors:

ABOUT HELP FOR HEROES

Help for Heroes offers comprehensive support to those who have suffered life-changing injuries and illnesses while serving our country. This support is provided through grants direct to our Heroes and their families, grants to other charities and through four Recovery Centres across the UK. A recent study launched in January 2016 by King's College London and Help for Heroes estimated that, of the 750,000 men and women who served as Regulars between 1991 and 2014, at least 66,000 might need long term support. www.helpforheroes.org.uk