



WELCOME TO OUR 2025 WINTER NEWSLETTER

FROM JAMIE CRISP, CEO

As 2024 draws to a close, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude as I reflect on the incredible achievements HighGround has accomplished this year. It has been a year of growth, innovation, and connection, as we continue to provide invaluable opportunities for service leavers, reservists, and veterans within the land-based sector. A huge thank you to all our HighGround team, Trustees, volunteers, and Friends of HighGround for your unwavering support, dedication, and passion—you are the backbone of everything we do.

There have been some Key Highlights of 2024: We were honoured to receive the Gold Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Award this year. This prestigious recognition underscores our unwavering commitment to supporting the Armed Forces community and integrating their unique skills into the land-based sector. Achieving ERS Gold is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the entire HighGround team and the strength of our partnerships.

We have continued to build strong relationships Landbased organisations in support of our delivery. Critical advocacy especially our ongoing collaboration with the Country Land and Business Association (CLA) has been instrumental in strengthening our ties within the rural economy. This partnership is opening up exciting new pathways for veterans and service leavers into careers across the countryside.

We are proud to play a key role in OP Prosper this year. Through this initiative, we have provided guidance, mentorship, and opportunities for service personnel and veterans transitioning into civilian life, particularly within the thriving land-based sector.

This year saw the successful delivery of both Virtual and Residential Rural Weeks, ensuring accessibility for those who couldn't attend in person. These weeks are vital for introducing service leavers and veterans to the broad range of opportunities in agriculture, forestry, conservation, and more. Additionally, we've launched our dedicated programme for female veterans, helping them transition into land-based roles and education, a milestone we are particularly proud of.

HighGround's presence at networking events such as Career Transition Partnership (CTP) and BFRS has been pivotal in engaging with service leavers and veterans. These events allow us to showcase the incredible opportunities within the land-based sector and reinforce our commitment to supporting career transitions.

Memorable Gatherings: We were honoured to participate in receptions at the Farmers Club & House of Lords, cementing our affiliation with esteemed organisations such as the Pen and Sword Club and SSAFA. These moments of connection are vital in strengthening our mission and expanding our reach.

Charity of Choice : This year, we were thrilled to become the charity of choice for City Veterans CIC. Their support, alongside the moving experience of Carols at the Guards Chapel, highlighted the importance of community and shared purpose.

Team Growth: We welcomed Grace Aldis, our new Occupational Therapist, to the team. Grace is making a remarkable impact through her delivery of Horticultural Therapy at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre Stanford Hall. Her expertise and compassion enrich our mission of supporting those in recovery and transition.

A Look Ahead to 2025: As we step into 2025, we are filled with anticipation and ambition. We aim to build upon this year's successes by:

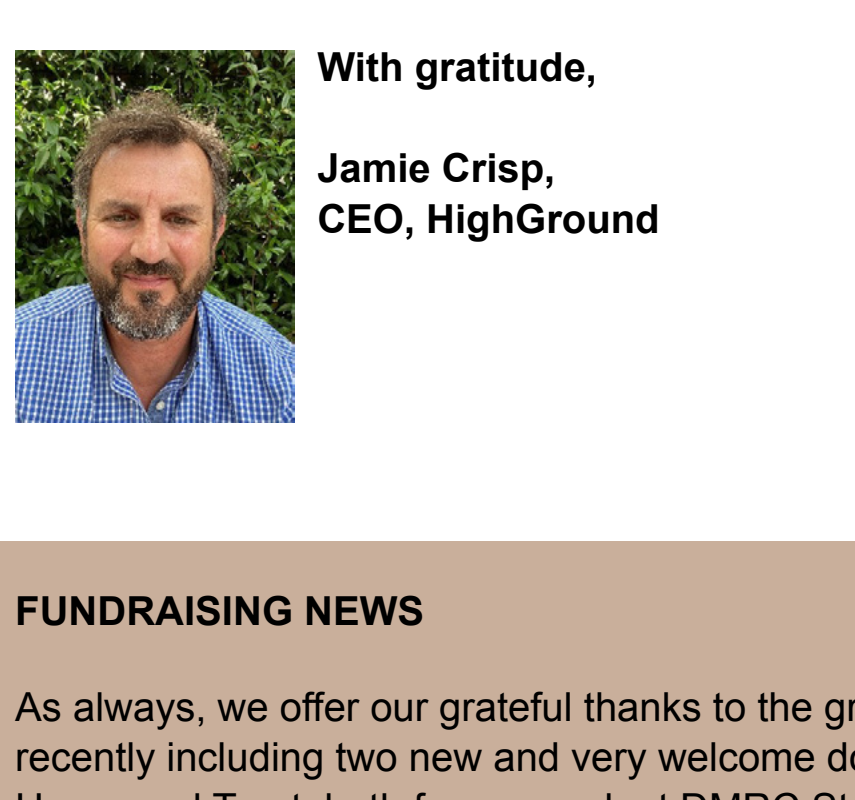
Expanding our Rural Weeks and Virtual Rural Weeks to reach even more service leavers and veterans.

Strengthening partnerships with organisations like the CLA, NFU, SLE , TIAH, City Veterans CIC, and others to unlock new opportunities within the land-based sector.

Continuing to innovate and tailor our programmes, including the Female Veterans initiative.

Deepening our impact at DMRC Stanford Hall through horticultural therapy and other initiatives.

Exploring new funding opportunities and maintaining our gratitude for the grants, donations, and fundraising efforts that make our work possible.



Anna Baker Cresswell

At the end of May we will say goodbye to HighGround Founder and visionary, Anna Baker Cresswell. Anna's vision and tireless dedication have helped numerous individuals, through HighGround's horticultural therapy services and for those transitioning from military to civilian life, into the land-based sector. Her unwavering commitment has left an indelible mark on the Armed Forces community and the land-based sector alike. All at HighGround are immensely grateful and proud of what has been achieved in the past 13 years, and we wish Anna huge success in her next venture.

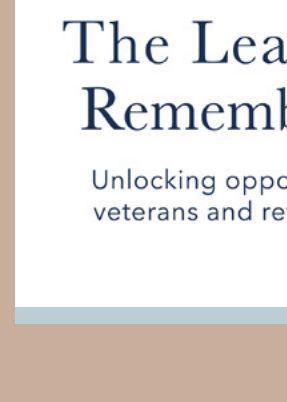
For the full press release please [read more](#).

A celebration of Anna will be published later in the year.

Finally, A Heartfelt Thank You:

None of this would be possible without the generous support of our donors, fundraisers, and grant providers. Your contributions enable us to deliver life-changing opportunities for service leavers, reservists, and veterans. Together, we are making a real difference in their lives and the land-based sector.

As we close out 2024, I extend my deepest thanks to everyone who has supported HighGround. Here's to a prosperous and impactful 2025—together, we will continue to make a difference.



With gratitude,

Jamie Crisp,
CEO, HighGround

FUNDRAISING NEWS

As always, we offer our grateful thanks to the grant-making trusts who have funded us recently including two new and very welcome donors, the League of Remembrance and Haramead Trust, both for our work at DMRC Stanford Hall.

We also thank the Veterans' Foundation, RAF Benevolent Fund, Scott Eredine Trust, the Army Central Fund and the wonderful Marmalade Ladies from Horsted Keynes Tuesday Club for their continued generosity.

Special thanks to Edington Priory Church who chose HighGround as the beneficiary of their Remembrance Day collection.

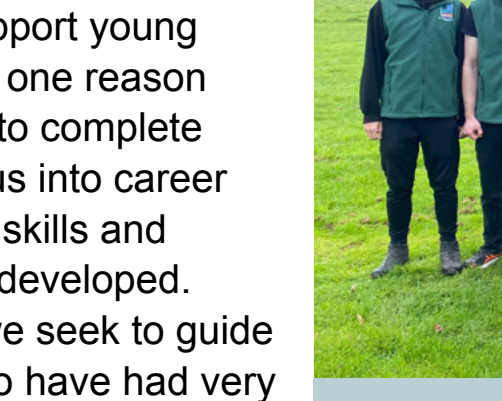
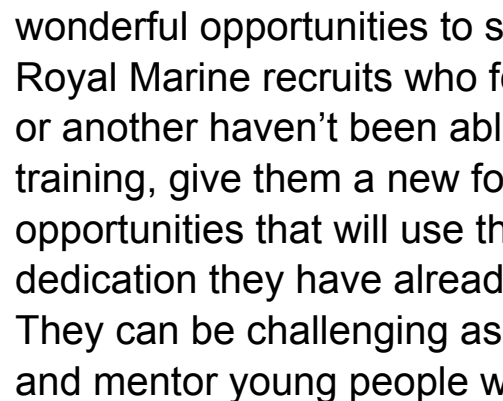
Huge thanks also to the City Veterans CIC Committee for such a wonderful carol service at the Guards' Chapel where the retiring collection raised £945 for HighGround.

Preparations are under way for the fundraising dinner at Lancaster House on 29th May and I'll be contacting Friends soon for auction prize ideas so we can make the very most of this unique and precious opportunity to raise funds for HighGround.

A new year brings a full programme of Rural Weeks, and the expanded team at DMRC Stanford Hall are looking forward to the new growing year as all of us gardeners do. It will cost HighGround £440,000 to deliver these services in 2025/2026 and we currently receive no statutory funding and are wholly reliant on grant-making trusts and your our Friends for our income.

If anyone reading this has made a New Year Resolution to run, swim, walk, bake or fundraise in any way at all, we would be so proud if you chose [HighGround as your charity](#).

Of note, we will be changing our fundraising platform from LocalGiving to GoodHub on February 1st 2025 – the website and social media will announce and reflect this. The same simple click of a button will take you to the relevant pages.



Edington Priory Church



Carol Service

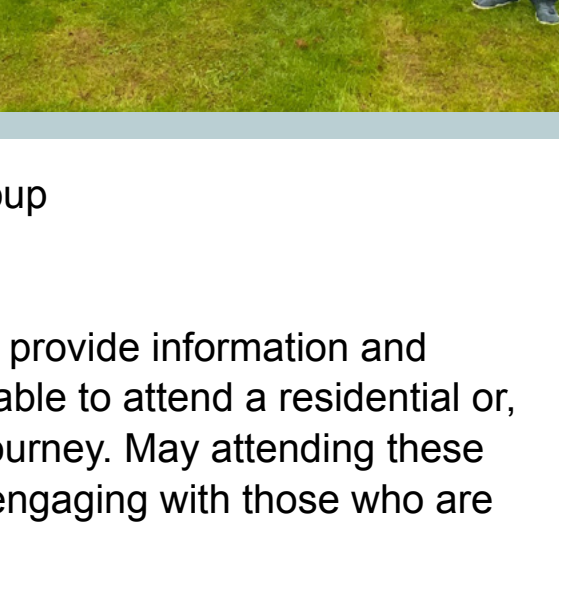
HORTICULTURAL THERAPY – DMRC STANFORD HALL

The winter season has seen a focus on seasonal crafts along with our fair share of cold winter weather.

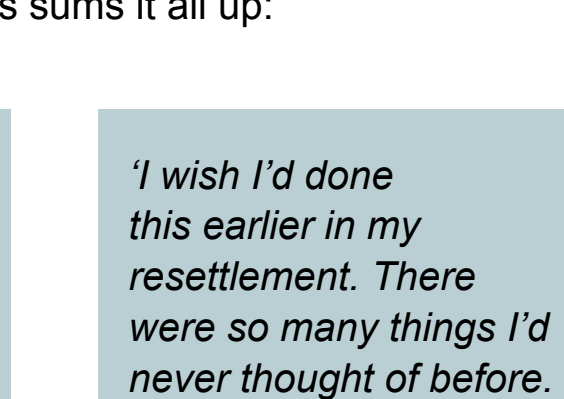
The Christmas wreath making continues to be popular as a therapeutic activity for patients and to support the DMRC staff health and well-being initiative. The HighGround Horticultural Therapy team hosted several workshops for staff which were well attended and appreciated. This year our new staff member, Grace Aldis, Horticultural Therapist, also ran an additional willow weaving workshop for the OT staff creating Christmas trees and star decorations. It was an opportunity to use skills gained from willow weaving courses attended by us earlier in the year as we try and develop the range of therapeutic activities offered by the service.

Winter pruning of shrubs and roses has generated material for hardening cuttings. We have also spent time servicing and sharpening pruning tools all good tasks for this time of year.

As we start the new year so begins the seed sowing in preparation for the season ahead. We are hoping to expand the range of flowers for cutting and grow our usual mixture of edible and ornamental plants. The addition of two large, raised beds from the Pears Walled Garden will provide much needed extra space for growing. This generates both a range of activities for patients and a way of generating income for the service through donations made at our annual farm shop.



Greenhouse in the snow



Willow weaving

OPERATIONS NEWS

RURAL WEEKS

Our late autumn rural weeks saw another Royal Marines Association-The Royal Marines Charity supported Rural Experience Week at Bicton College. These weeks are wonderful opportunities to support young Royal Marine recruits who for one reason or another haven't been able to complete training, give them a new focus into career opportunities that will use the skills and dedication they have already developed. They can be challenging as we seek to guide and mentor young people who have had very single-minded focus and can understandably be unconvinced about opportunities being presented. We love seeking the changes that happen and the awakening sense of renewed purpose.

We also had our last Residential Rural Week of the year, again at Bicton College where we thank for their excellent hospitality and enthusiastic support of the Armed Forces. The week was filled with enthusiastic, challenging and thought-provoking conversations with a great group of serving personnel and veterans sharing opinions and wide-ranging experience. The follow up conversations that take place after all rural weeks have been nothing short of inspiring.

The final virtual rural week again provided an opportunity to provide information and guidance to a group of individuals who may not have been able to attend a residential or, who are at the general enquiry stage of their resettlement journey. May attending these weeks have not signed off and we are always happy to be engaging with those who are testing the waters.

We'd like to pay special thanks to Chris Shepherd and Pete Boorn who make the rural weeks the success they are. Their knowledge, approach, humour and contacts are fundamental and deeply appreciated.

Thanks also to all the wonderful presenters who give time so generously, whether on virtual or residential weeks. The impact you have on all the beneficiaries is incredible.

The feedback from just a few of those who attended courses sums it all up:

'I felt the course was tailor-made for me, it answered so many questions. HighGround seems really 'together' and Chris and Pete did the most wonderful job through the whole week. It's given me the motivation I needed.'
WO1, Army, in resettlement

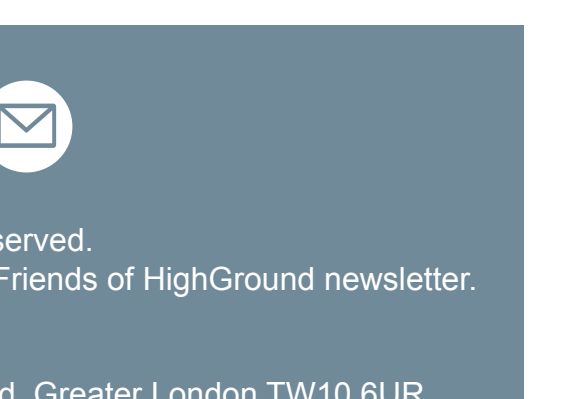
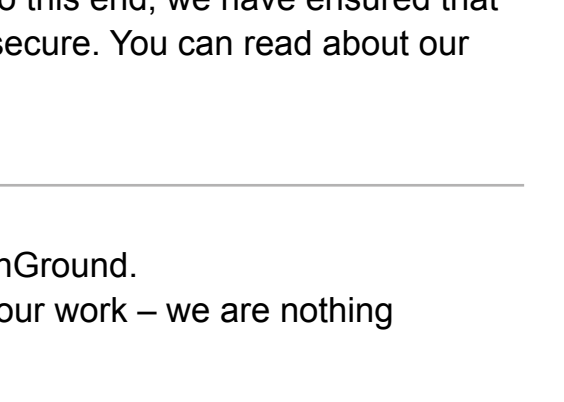
'The exposure to so many people who genuinely love what they do was fantastic. I came away with three areas I really want to explore, which as I knew nothing about what direction I wanted to go in beforehand, has really settled me.'
RN Officer, veteran

'I wish I'd done this earlier in my resettlement. There were so many things I'd never thought of before. The help and guidance from all of you has been so much more than I could have hoped for.'
RM Officer, veteran

CAREERS EVENTS

A busy year of attending careers fairs across the UK will be replicated in 2025 with 12 already booked in. These alongside appearances at The National Transition Event; Female Veterans networking event, Edinburgh; The Gen Dit Network event, Bristol; Ladies into Employment event, London; RMA – The Royal Marines Charity Corps Families Day; plus, monthly visits to Teddworth Hall and presentations to PRU's around the country and attendance at various land-based events will keep putting HighGround at the forefront of supporting service leavers and veterans into careers in the rural sector.

If you would like us to come and do a presentation to your organisation or group, please do get in touch. Diaries depending, we will do our best to attend.



WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

We are ramping up the HighGround social media presence and you will already have seen evidence of more regular posts and stories to celebrate and inform about what we are doing.

The website continues to develop and 2025 will see more improvements to help engagement and provide increased information, support and guidance. We are planning more celebrations of [Good News](#) – those stories about beneficiaries who have started careers in the rural sector, so please do let us know what you are up to. Send stories and updates to Heather operationsmanager@highground-uk.org

To support this, in early February, we will also be sending a questionnaire to as many beneficiaries as possible. Please look out for this, we would be grateful if you could complete and return it. Impact reporting plays a huge role in securing future funding so the information we gather on those who have been through our rural weeks really does matter.

The HighGrounders group on LinkedIn is still a great repository of job opportunities and a place to grow awareness of the opportunities available in the rural sector. If you have a job opportunity, work placement or volunteer opportunity that might be of interest to service leavers and veterans, please do contact Heather.

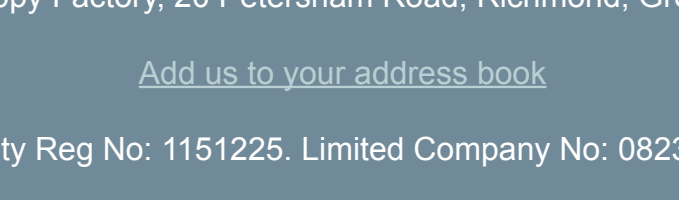
GET IN TOUCH

DONATE NOW

GDPR AND OUR STANDARDS

GDPR came into effect on 25th May 2018. We had an extremely busy run up to this date, but our small team were able to pull out all the stops and get things in place in time. As a charity we take GDPR and the security of your information very seriously. To this end, we have ensured that all of our data processors comply rigorously to keep everything secure. You can read about our Standards [here](#).

You are reading this newsletter because you are a Friend of HighGround. Do please share it with anyone you think would be interested in our work – we are nothing without our Friends.



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Funded by the Armed Forces Covenant with funding from the Covenant Fund. We are proud to be a member of Cobseo.

