

News story: Defence Minister meets poppy producing veterans going for gold

The Poppy Factory employs 27 disabled veterans in Richmond to produce poppies and wreaths for the Royal Family and the Royal British Legion, but not content with making 12.5 million poppies last year, they are now looking to gold-plate their award-winning employment scheme.

They are also the country's leading employability organisation for disabled military veterans, providing a free service to veterans with a medical condition or impairment across England and Wales to get back into work.

Having helped almost 700 people into employment since 2010, the charity won the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Silver Award last year for demonstrating great support to the Armed Forces community, and one of Deirdre Mills' key goals in her new role is to go for gold this year.

As part of the Armed Forces Covenant, which the government enshrined in law as a promise from the nation to ensure that the Armed Forces community are not at a disadvantage, the annual Defence Employer Recognition Scheme encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same – and the Poppy Factory is certainly doing that.

Defence Minister Earl Howe said:

From helping veterans across the country overcome adversity and get back into work, to empowering those who have inspired me here in Richmond today to contribute to such an honourable cause, the magnificent work of the Poppy Factory is a credit to the Armed Forces Covenant and I'm thrilled to see Deirdre is driving for even more success.

Earl Howe with Poppy Factory CEO Deirdre Mills.

Their new CEO Deirdre Mills enjoyed a successful career in the British Army herself before getting involved in charity work.

She said:

Our support is really making a difference, whether it be providing career advice or meeting the more complex needs of some of the hardest-to-help individuals in society. There is also a growing number of disabled veterans who are being referred to us by other organisations; this is both testament to the quality of our work and indicative of the growing number of military charities that are

now working together to produce the best results.

We are working hard to accommodate and champion the needs of disabled people and a Gold Award will really help us demonstrate this to our donors and the public – we need to secure over £2m in sustainable funding each year to provide our life-changing service.

Earl Howe met Gary Lock, an ex Serviceman from 4 Battalion Royal Regiment of Wales.

Amongst those who Earl Howe met today was Gary Lock, an ex Serviceman from 4 Battalion Royal Regiment of Wales, who has been working at the factory since September. Suffering from a serious hip injury, Gary got in touch with the Poppy Factory looking for employment.

He said:

I really enjoy coming to work, and it's great to have a laugh and a joke while you're doing something that's making a difference.