# Meet the volunteer ‘Blood Bikes’ who deliver blood to local air ambulance charity

**Tuesday 19 June, 2018**

Meet the team of bikers who voluntarily give up their free time to deliver lifesaving blood products to the Great Western Air Ambulance Charity (GWAAC), every day of the week, every day of the year; whom, without their services, GWAAC would simply not be able to save as many lives as they do.

Freewheelers are a team of volunteers who deliver lifesaving blood and plasma to GWAAC every day of the year. Known as the Blood Bikes, they are all bikers who work tirelessly to carry this and other medical items across the South West. This is why Freewheelers are of utmost importance to GWAAC and indeed the public.

GWAAC’s Critical Care Doctors and Paramedics have been able to save more lives since they started to carry blood and plasma as part of their kit. The Critical Care team attend to emergencies where patients often need immediate treatment which cannot wait for the hospital, and the blood and plasma is vital, for example where the patient is losing blood at a very rapid rate, the use of plasma, with its vital clotting factors, can stabilise a patient. The crew are Doctors and Paramedics with specialist training and carry out many of the same surgical interventions that you would expect to take place in hospital; however, the GWAAC crew carry those out at the side of the road, in parks or in someone’s house or back garden. Therefore, the delivery of blood and plasma made by Freewheelers to the GWAAC crew is vital for saving those lives in those very critical times of emergency.

GWAAC will be hosting its third ride out event this summer, Sunday 15th July. The event is run in close conjunction with Freewheelers and in particular Mel Rowbottom, who plays a vital role in organising the event alongside GWAAC colleagues. Road safety is an integral part of GWAAC’s work. Last year we attended 329 road traffic collisions, many of which involved motorcyclists. This is why we will be hosting a ride out which unites riders and highlights safety issues as a biker. Some riders taking part may have been patients that GWAAC have saved.

Mel has been a biker for 16 years, an advanced rider since 2003 and a Freewheeler since 2008 (you must be an advanced rider in order to be a Freewheeler). For Mel, a full time Accountant for BT, her hobby became something of significant importance, driving a motorbike to deliver these lifesaving products.

Mel commented on working with us for the ride out: “Being a member of the Bristol Advanced Motorcyclists group, I often lead ride outs for them, although on a much smaller scale! After the first GWAAC ride out in which I helped to marshall and act as the last rider sweeping up the group, I was asked to help with the organising of future ride outs and volunteered to lead. Part of organising the ride out means we get to meet up with other motorcycle groups and spread the word about the ride out, plus encourage a few extra people to marshall so we don’t run out!”

Freewheelers carry out 50 jobs a week Monday to Thursday, and up to 90 jobs over the weekend. They need to raise £120,000 per year to fund themselves and £15,000 funds their service to us at the air ambulance. In total, there are 120 Freewheelers that carry out this vital service to us all in the South West – Bristol, Bath and Taunton being the main delivery locations.

The GWAAC crew unfortunately attend to a great number of motorbike accidents, so hosting this ride out as a way of fundraising to keep us flying is very meaningful to the GWAAC team and its Blood Biker colleagues.

To find out more about Ride4GWAAC and support our life-saving work, click here. If you are a motorcyclist and would like to take part you can buy your ticket here.

**ENDS**

**Notes for editors**

- GWAAC provide the critical care and air ambulance service for 2.1 million people across the counties of Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire, North Somerset and surrounding areas.
- In 2018 the charity celebrates ten years since its first flight.

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- The GWAAC critical care team consists of a highly trained and experienced Critical Care Paramedic and Doctor, who bring the skill and expertise of an Accident and Emergency Department to the patient.
- In 2017 the Critical Care Team attended 1,824 jobs: by helicopter and by one of our critical care cars.
- We need to raise over £3 million each year to stay operational, but receive no day to day funding from the Government or National Lottery.
- To find out more about Freewheelers and being a Blood Biker, follow this link.

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