

SSAFA: 125 today and expanding in France

Volunteers are needed in Brittany, Normandy and Central France, explains SSAFA France president Dick Bogg

This year, the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) Forces Help celebrates its 125th anniversary. While members of Britain's Armed Forces are working in extremely dangerous and challenging circumstances, SSAFA Forces Help continues to provide British servicemen and women, and their families, with practical support. The charity also helps those who have served and in some circumstances dependants and divorcees as well. Most of SSAFA's work in France deals with these latter groups.

Every year SSAFA's network of trained volunteers assists some 50,000 people ranging from World War II veterans and National Servicemen to members of the Territorial Army. That support continues beyond retirement from the armed forces, and here in France there is a network of hard-working volunteers.

SSAFA France has existed since 2004, centred initially in Aquitaine but quickly expanding across the country. SSAFA France now has a firm handle on where ex-servicemen and women have retired to and the types of problems they face. The association receives about two new cases every week and last year the charity helped people in difficulty to

the tune of more than €200,000 countrywide.

However, SSAFA itself is no more immune from the financial difficulties everyone is facing during the current crisis and some of its volunteers have returned to the UK, creating vacancies. At the same time, there are still gaps in coverage.

If you feel that you could help to meet the continuing call for assistance please do not hesitate to come forward, wherever you live. The areas where SSAFA France is most desperate for additional help are Brittany, the coastal fringe between Caen and Dieppe, the area to the west of the line between Poitiers-Le Mans right out to the coast, and the Poitiers-Limoges-Bourges triangle. Remember though that SSAFA is a voluntary organisation; there are no salaried staff in France although expenses are paid for benevolent casework.

The charity stems from the vision and drive of one man. In February 1885, as the Second Expeditionary Force set sail for Egypt, Major James Gildea wrote to 'The Times', appealing for funds and volunteers to look after families left behind. Within three months the Soldiers and Sailors Families Association was born. The charity got off to a flying

start and committees of volunteers were quickly established. The two World Wars changed the lives of many families. The association, whose name changed in 1921 to include Airmen, assisted those in need with a unique blend of very practical support and advice, thanks to the dedication of thousands of volunteers. By the end of World War II, SSAFA was administering more than a million pounds a year to help the serving community.

The charity has always adapted to the needs of the times. Today, for example, as the number of fatalities and serious injuries sustained in Afghanistan continues to rise, SSAFA's family support groups are playing a vital role in helping relatives come to terms with loss and life-changing injuries. The two new SSAFA Norton Homes, where families of wounded servicemen and women can stay close while they are being treated, are the latest demonstration of an organisation that has developed and remained true to Major Gildea's vision: that no greater responsibility rests on us all than the care of our soldiers, sailors, airmen and their families.

Contact details: email France@ssafa.org.uk or tel. 05 53 24 92 38 (NB: this is a new SSAFA phone number).



Air France flies low and Flybe takes off

Air France-KLM has announced that it is to set up a low-cost operation under the name Air France Express. It is to be based at Marseille, Nice and Toulouse. Air France already operates low-cost Transavia.com, mostly operating out of Amsterdam.

At the same time, Flybe has begun taking bookings for its routes to London-Gatwick from Nantes and to Southampton from Avignon, Bergerac, Nice and Rennes. There are now flights between Paris and Manchester, Birmingham and – new destination – Edinburgh. From October 31, 2010, all Flybe Paris flights will leave from Terminal 2E at Roissy-Charles-de-Gaulle. From now on there will be seven flights a day from Paris to Manchester, six to Birmingham and three to Southampton.

Find a home.com

The task of choosing an old people's home has been made easier by the Fédération hospitalières de France FHF. They have set up a website www.maisons-de-retraite.fr that lists *maisons de retraites*. The site is modelled on their successful site www.hopital.fr. It can be searched geographically and according to the degree of dependence involved. There is information on types of establishment and how to look after an old person at home, and other advice. The FHF says that although finding a home is a common problem it is often urgent and has been dealt with piecemeal in the past. There are 10,000 old people's homes in France that look after 700,000 inmates. *FW*

Technically speaking with Marcus Williamson

Mobile broadband for visitors from the UK

We've looked previously at options for Internet access. A number of people have been asking how to get on the Internet in France, when visiting from the UK, without having to use the free Wi-Fi at a well-known fast-food outlet or certain supermarket cafeterias.

All UK mobile phone providers offer mobile Internet access via a USB stick, colloquially known as a 'dongle', which plugs into the USB port on your laptop and provides Internet access via the mobile phone network. In the same way as you can use a UK mobile phone to roam abroad, you can also take your dongle with you to get online.

When roaming, the mobile providers charge per megabyte (MB) of data transferred. Considering that an average MP3 music file is around 5MB, it's very easy to run up high charges. So, you should consider switching off any software updates and limit your access to essential emails and surfing, with certainly no music or video.

Here's a summary of the UK providers' offerings:

O2

O2 charges £5 per month for mobile Internet use on a 30-day rolling contract. For roaming in France, O2 recommends purchasing a £50 Data Abroad pack which allows up to 50MB of data. Additional data is charged at £3 per MB.

O2 states quite candidly on its website: "We recommend you avoid using Mobile Broadband abroad..." for reasons of cost.

More info: www.o2.co.uk/broadband/mobile/

Orange

Orange charges between £5 and £35 per month, with a contract length of one or 18 months. When roaming in France you are charged £3 per MB.

More info: <http://shop.orange.co.uk/mobile-broadband/dongles>

T-Mobile

T-Mobile charges £15 per month on contract or from £2 per day to £15 per month, on a pay-as-you-go basis. When roaming in France and the rest

of Europe you can buy packs ranging from £1 for 3MB to £40 for 200MB.

More info: <http://www.t-mobile.co.uk/shop/mobile-broadband/>

Three

Three charges £7.50 or £15 per month for mobile Internet, depending on the contract. When used in France you will be charged £1.25 per MB.

More info: <http://threestore.three.co.uk/broadband/>

Vodafone

Vodafone charges £15 per month for mobile Internet on contract and £20 per month on a pay-as-you-go basis. In France there's a charge of £9.99 per day for up to 50MB of data.

More info: <http://www.vodafone.co.uk/broadband/mobile-broadband>

In a coming issue, we'll look at mobile broadband using French mobile phone providers.

French Week invites you to e-mail Marcus with your questions for the *Technically Speaking Questions and Answers* section: cointechno@french-week.com

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