Founders of Scottish Tech Army recognised with honours

Peter Jaco (62) and Dr Alistair Forbes (60) have both been awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) for the work they have done this past year in founding the Scottish Tech Army. The official citation reads 'For services to Charity during the Covid-19 Response'.

The Scottish Tech Army is a separate organisation from Civtech which is an initiative of the digital directorate of the Scottish Government and so is a public sector organisation. The Scottish Tech Army is an independent not for profit organisation, but was helped by CivTech who matched volunteers with Covid-19 related projects which were most suitable for them.

The volunteers who stepped forward to work for the [Scottish Tech Army](#) (STA) were largely specialist workers in coding, computing and the tech industries. Most were on furlough and so were able to give their services and time free of charge. Over 1,200 volunteers from the Scottish tech community have supported more than 175 projects all responding to Covid-19.

Dr Forbes told The Edinburgh Reporter how pleased he was at the recognition. He said: "Well I'm surprised to be honest because it has only been going for about nine months or so. But I'm really thrilled at the recognition that it represents

for all the volunteers who have taken part in the initiative. You know, obviously, Peter and I were involved in launching the venture, but if it hadn't been for all the volunteers who've stepped forward, and we wouldn't have been able to achieve anything at all. It is very much a recognition of al the work that the volunteers have put in and the impact they have been able to make."

Alistair is an investor who has worked in and with many early and growth stage businesses in Scotland and around the world. He has long been a passionate supporter of projects that harness technology for impact.

Peter Jaco is an angel investor who sits on the [CivTech](#) Advisory Group. He chairs tech start-ups CyberOwl and Immense Simulations and has worked on over a dozen start-up projects prior to establishing [Scottish Tech Army](#).

They realised at the start of the outbreak that many charities and organisations in Scotland faced huge increases in demand while having to suddenly start delivering services in a virtual capacity. Rapidly forming a team of leaders in the industry to lend their skills and expertise for free to support organisations develop their digital platforms, overcome IT barriers and offer technological advice became a great success.

Within a week of launching the initiative, 200 people had joined as volunteers, and this army has since continued to grow, supporting a range of projects based in over 70 locations across Scotland, within health and social care, education and training, remote support, travel and tourism, and local business recovery.

Peter and Alistair led volunteers with the Scottish Tech Army in the development of a Covid-19 dashboard to capture real-time information on the number of cases in health boards across Scotland, supporting the Scottish Government's Covid-19

Route Map.

The dashboard, which was made available from the start of September 2020, provides a visual, interactive and accessible presentation of the data published through the Scottish Government that is helping to harness regional insights on the spread of the virus and serve as a live information resource for members of the public.

The Scottish Tech Army has carried out work for a variety of organisations. Alistair explained that one of the earliest ones that they got involved in was with Voluntary Service Aberdeen which is a health and social care provider. They run about twenty different care facilities and needed to address the challenge of ensuring that all their staff had the correct PPE. They had been proactive in getting the PPE but the difficulty was coping with knowing what was needed where and when. The Scottish Tech Army stepped in and worked with them for about six weeks on a collaborative basis to find an online solution that enabled them to keep track of their inventory and then reorder the correct items at the correct time. The STA volunteers did not have to invent something from the ground up, but they took an inventory management solution and made it completely bespoke for the Aberdeenshire organisation. Everything is now known about in real time, all the data is up to the minute and immediately available to everyone. This was one of the larger projects which they dealt with.

Another project which they worked on for The Scottish Government supported the team responsible for dealing with issues of violence against women and girls. Dr Forbes explained: "You know, in in lockdown, there was a worsening of the situation around domestic violence. So we helped the volunteers who work with them to track and record that so they could make sure that the support services have been provided to victims of domestic violence and data in a timely manner."

And in Edinburgh the STA helped [Edinburgh Community Food](). Dr

Forbes said: "They've traditionally distributed food, and they've given cookery lessons. They help people to eat more healthily, and make sure that they were providing nutritious meals. Now, all of that was done face to face previously.

"So we helped them to get set up with the online distribution of that. We helped them to make some some videos of their cookery classes so that they could get the same information out that they would previously have shared in person out to people using online tools."

This is not the first time the pair have been recognised for their work these last months. The Prime Minister also awarded them a Points of Light Award in September. this is given to people who are making a change in their community, and that is truly what Peter Jaco and Alistair Forbes have done.

Dr Alistair Forbes BEM

Peter Jaco BEM