

A Needs Assessment of Veterans in Custody, their Families & Children

National
information
centre
on children
of offenders



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The National Centre for Children of Offenders or NICCO has been established to provide an information service for all professionals who come into contact with the children and families of offenders, as well as academics and those responsible for strategic development and commissioning. The Centre is delivered by Barnardo's in partnership with Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS).

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Foreword Barnardo's

Outcomes tend to be worse for prisoners' children than for their peers. Yet they are hidden, because no one counts them, and stigmatised, because their families often feel ashamed to ask for help. Barnardo's, along with other voluntary organisations, supports prisoners' children both in the community and inside prisons.

Every child deserves the best start in life so that they can achieve and thrive – no matter who their parents are or what they have done. Yet as this ground-breaking research shows, prisoners' ties with their families are put under immense strain before, during and after imprisonment. Barnardo's has long argued for prisons to take a family based approach to maintaining family ties by ensuring all prison visits and family days are not based on a system of privileges. Visiting a parent in prison is a right not a privilege.

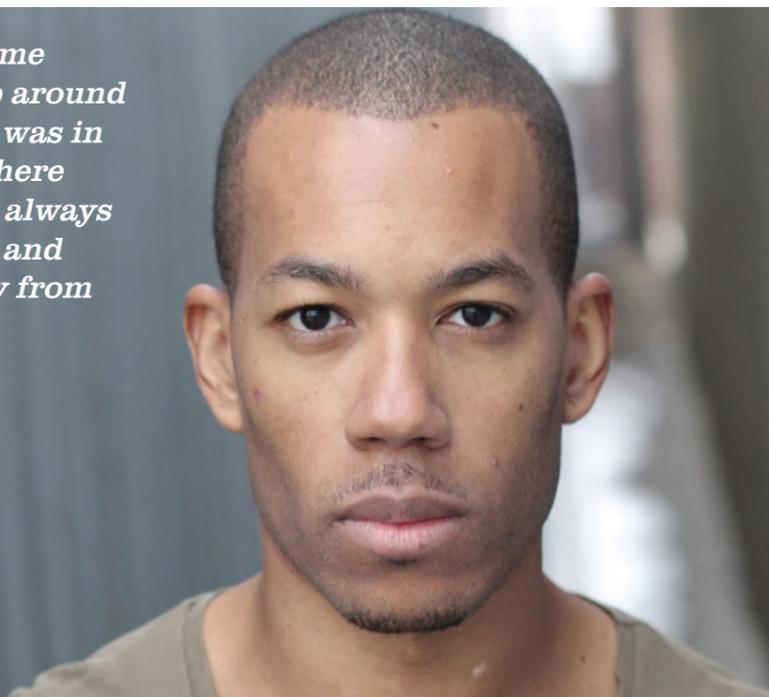
However, prison visits are only part of the solution. The recommendations in this report including early intervention, support with mental health problems and family breakdown are hardly new. What is needed is a change in systems and culture by all services so that veterans, their partners and most importantly their children receive the right support at the right time and the stigma of prison is removed. Only then can we truly start to improve the life chances of veterans and their families.



Sarah Crawley
Director
Barnardo's Cymru & South West England

"It's always been difficult for me growing up cos I've grown up around domestics with my mum. She was in between blokes here, blokes there and we was moving around. I always grew up around drink, drugs and domestic... I took myself away from that joining the Army."

(Veteran in Custody)



Foreword Forces in Mind Trust

Life is full of transitions, and we know from over 7 years of knowledge and evidence generation that for members of the Armed Forces, the transition into civilian life can be a challenge. Equally, we know that whilst most meet this challenge successfully, some people, for a variety of reasons, struggle. It is hard to imagine a more challenging transition than from being a respected member of the British military to being incarcerated for wrong doings.

Our research has yielded insights into the key role that the family of the Service leaver can play in making that transition successful, whilst acknowledging that the family members will also undergo their own transitions. Again, it takes little effort to imagine the terrible extra pressure on a family who are swapping a military for a civilian life, possibly abruptly, and with the main bread winner no longer able to contribute financially, emotionally or physically.

Regardless of whether entanglement with the criminal justice system happens during service, or indeed some time later, and no matter what the cause, it is the role of charities such as ours and Barnardo's to ensure that those most vulnerable are given the necessary support to rebuild their lives. And can there be anyone more deserving of every ounce of help that we can muster than the children affected by family breakdown, an absent parent, or one suffering a complex mental health issue?

This report correctly identifies the many factors that make supporting families of veterans in the criminal justice system so complicated. They range widely: alcohol abuse; loss of identity; stigma and inadequate services are all highlighted as contributing to poor outcomes for such families.

The solutions offered are hardly revolutionary though. Better access to healthcare, early interventions, improved families visits and an overriding need to solve the housing crisis that is afflicting our country. If we fix these, then we certainly help fix those families caught up in the criminal justice system, and perhaps we improve the chances of successful transition for many others too. We have clear evidence of what is needed and a moral imperative to help. We now call upon all those involved to consider the 14 recommendations in this report and to take whatever steps are necessary to deliver them. The children of our Armed Forces deserve nothing less.



Air Vice-Marshal Ray Lock CBE
Chief Executive, Forces in Mind Trust

Foreword

Steve Lowe

I welcome this research produced by The National Information Centre on Children of Offenders (NICCO, delivered by Barnardo's in partnership with HMPPS). This report provides a vital platform to hear from veterans with experience of custody, and their families and children.

The contribution of personal experience from the families of veterans, and veterans themselves who have experience of prison custody is very impactful to read. This has been invaluable to help shape observations and findings, alongside the input from expert stakeholders and steering group members. My gratitude to all those who assisted in this research.

Whilst the majority who join HM Armed Forces go on to enhance their future life opportunities after military service, there are those who for a range of reasons may not fare so well. This less fortunate group may have an increased risk of contact with the criminal justice system and the resulting impact on family members and children, it is this group that may experience the greatest need or vulnerability.

After my own transition from military service I began a professional career within the secure prison estate. In 2012 I was asked if I believed there was a hidden population of ex-military personnel within the prison estate. I honestly believed that this was not the case. As a prison Security Governor at the time, I was able to

introduce systems and mechanisms in my estate to identify any ex-military personnel. I was surprised to discover around 40 ex-military prisoners who otherwise would have gone unnoticed.

Through my prison work and later, across the wider criminal justice system with Project Nova (delivered in partnership by RFEA – The Forces Employment Charity and Walking With The Wounded), I have spent time getting to know veterans and their families. I have gained increasing awareness of the unique barriers and needs this group of veterans and their families experience, as well as the opportunities which could have helped to reduce their risk of contact with the criminal justice system in the first instance.

It is fair to recognise that since 2014 with the publication of key research, some progress and areas of good practice have started to be introduced regarding veterans in the criminal justice system, including the importance of taking a holistic approach which extends to veteran families. However, there is more to be achieved to ensure a consistent approach across the criminal justice system – for veterans and their families.



Steve Lowe
Manager, North of England
Project Nova

A note on key terms

For the purposes of this research, the terms below will be defined as follows.

Fathers

Male participants consulted as part of this research who are veterans, serving a custodial sentence or have been released in the last 12 months and have children 18 years or under.

Family/Families

General term referring to the nuclear family unit (parents and children) which may or may not be separated and include biological and step-children unless stated otherwise.

This term is also used by veterans to describe their military 'family', a reference to the level of connection to their colleagues in the military which continues once they have left. When referring to this 'family', quotation marks will be used.

HM Armed Forces

Term to refer to the entirety of Her Majesty's Armed Forces (The Army, Royal Air Force and Royal Navy), also referred to as 'the military' and only includes members of the British Armed Forces.

Mothers/Partners

Female participants consulted as part of this research who are the primary female caregivers for children with a veteran father in custody/ recently released. This term includes ex-partners, current partners and wives.

Serving

This term is used to refer to both serving in the military and serving a custodial sentence. This term will be qualified to ensure it is clear if the 'serving' referred to is their military service or a custodial sentence.

Veteran/Ex-Armed Service Personnel

Following the original definition used by Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA), we define a veteran as "a former member of the British Armed Forces who has served more than 1 day".

The actual term 'veteran' is used widely to describe tailored support in prison estates and as such, this was the language we adopted during the research and, for consistency, carried through into this report. However, as will be discussed later in the report, our interview participants did not generally relate to this term and we make recommendations to adopt the term 'ex-Armed Service Personnel' or former member of the Armed Forces.

VICSO

Veteran in Custody Support Officer.

Introduction

Why this needs assessment?

Over recent years, research has demonstrated the need for an increasing emphasis on offenders maintaining family ties as ‘indispensable to the rehabilitation culture’ (Farmer Review Ministry of Justice, 2017). As a result, there is a need to understand the complexities of supporting offender family relationships amongst all groups. At the same time, there has been increasing attention on the high numbers of veterans in the criminal justice system but the voice and experiences of children and families of veterans in custody is absent.

In acknowledging this ‘gap’ in evidence, Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) awarded a grant to Barnardo’s NICCO (National Information Centre for Children of Offenders) to undertake a needs assessment of male veteran offenders and their families before, during and after imprisonment in order to improve the whole families’ outcomes in relation to wellbeing and transitions into and out of custody. This needs assessment involves in-depth qualitative research with: veterans in custody (or who have been released from custody) who have children with whom they have permitted contact, the children and families of veterans serving custodial sentences and key professionals from criminal justice, veteran and family support agencies.

Why Barnardo’s?

Barnardo’s has extensive knowledge of the impact of parental offending and imprisonment on the child via our national NICCO service, community-based Children Affected by Parental Offending (CAPO) support services, prison-based family support services and CAPO professional training programmes. Barnardo’s has also gained significant knowledge of the experiences of families of current and ex-armed services personnel through a stakeholder consultation for an application to the Plymouth Families in Stress Fund (Armed Forces Covenant) and through its Families of Veterans Support Service which operated in Wales. This therefore puts Barnardo’s in the unique position to be able to undertake this study.

Barnardo’s has used its experience of supporting children affected by parental offending to highlight the key role that maintaining family relationships plays in reducing re-offending. We have published research-based reports calling for a family based approach to family visits and calling for changes to the Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme.¹



1. <https://b.barnardos.org.uk/just-visiting.pdf>
<https://b.barnardos.org.uk/locked-out-report.pdf>

Executive Summary

Aims of this research

There is very limited (and no recent) qualitative research which demonstrates the two-fold impact of veteran status alongside imprisonment on veterans as family members or their families. This needs assessment will build on the research that has already been conducted by providing a platform for the voices of veterans in custody, their families and children. We seek to establish whether the needs of veterans identified in previous studies impacts on family relationships and the needs of their partners and children and explore how those needs can be met effectively.

We acknowledge that since the ‘Veterans Transition Review’ undertaken by Lord Ashcroft (2014), the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has made significant improvements to the transition experience of those who have left HM Armed Forces in the last 5 years. However our study shines a light on how to build on these improvements and the issues that those veteran and families who left service prior to these improvements are currently experiencing.

Key Findings

- **Family experience is cited by veterans as influential at key points in their military service**

The interconnectivity between military service and family or relationships with significant others within our sample was strong. This arose at various points such as being motivated to join up because they wanted to leave their parental home situation, or conversely because they were inspired by family who were serving or had served. Similarly, our veterans cited a desire to return to the family they had created as a motivator for leaving the forces. The military itself was frequently referred to as another version of ‘family’, providing the kind of close relationships, loyalty and care that is usually associated with the traditional family unit.

- **Children of veterans in custody are likely to have experienced family breakdown**

Our sample revealed a shocking level of family breakdown. Only 11 of the 43 (26%) of children identified in our sample were living, or expected to live, with both birth parents when their fathers were released from custody. The national rate of children aged 0-14 years living with both parents is 66%. We are aware that our sample size is relatively small and further information would be required to make a general comparison. Breakdown had often occurred before the period of custody and begs the question about family support during and after active service. Incidents of domestic violence, mental health and substance misuse all play a part. Participants reflected on the multiple gaps children experienced in their relationships during active service and the emotional charge associated with these absences, in terms of anxiety. Many men had some awareness of the impact of this, including contrasting pride while in service and shame while in custody. This finding indicated the challenge of maintaining relationships between children and fathers when contact is limited and often reliant on third parties such as grandparents. However, out of the 43 children disclosed in the sample, including step children, 32 had contact during the custodial sentence. It is noted that telephone contact was high and the ambition of Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to improve technological communication is welcome. We would like to see a more holistic early intervention family service being offered for veterans and their families. We would suggest this is funded by the MOD and provided in collaboration between services specialising in family work and veteran support.

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- **Those in greatest difficulty appear to have least support**

A significant number of our sample had been discharged following sanction by the military. It was evident that this compromised any transition planning and in turn, this 'punishment' was also felt by family members. All veterans we consulted expected to complete their full military service and leaving early and/or facing dishonourable discharge was unplanned. Seven veterans were discharged dishonourably, four of these would be classed as Early Service Leavers (ESLs). The immediacy of being discharged compromised transition planning and therefore, potentially increased their vulnerability, both practically and emotionally in civilian life. This inevitably impacted on family members.

- **Recording the family situation of veterans in custody**

It is apparent that neither the prison, who collect numbers of identified veterans, nor the military charities, nor the peer support groups, collect information on dependents or family situation. Whilst many charities told us they believed they gave assistance to families, there was no way to ascertain the nature or scale of this support. Similarly it is very difficult to establish scale or nature of need. Thus this group are likely to remain invisible and a comprehensive assessment of need is unlikely unless the information about family circumstance is routinely collected. It is acknowledged that despite many, repeated, and varied methods to identify family members and seek their engagement with this needs assessment, it proved extremely difficult. While the numbers who did engage are small, their experiences and insights are unique and all the more valuable for that. We would like to see mandatory recording introduced and further work undertaken to establish scale and need.

- **Veterans and their families are unclear who should say what, to whom**

Veterans, partners and children all indicated that they are uncertain about what to say to whom in terms of each other, professionals and/or others outside the immediate family. Fear of causing upset, exacerbating the problems, showing or appearing to show weakness were recurring reasons. There was particular concern for veterans and partners reporting uncertainty around any restrictions from probation and/or social services with regard to contact with children. This meant that some children may not be having contact they were entitled to, and all concerned were dealing with uncertainty and emotion around this topic. It is important that where involved, professionals should make the first move and that families should be encouraged to be open and honest with their children in an age appropriate way.

- **Barriers for families accessing military charities**

(Almost) universally, families are reliant on 'their' veterans to inform them of the support available and to be eligible; the veteran's military service must be verified. We observed that many veterans do not always identify as such and therefore do not see support services as applicable to them. This can be because they are not fully aware of the definition and associate the term with either those who have long service or those who have experienced active service. For those who do recognise themselves as veterans there was an acknowledgement of concern that, should they reveal this to criminal justice agencies, this might have negative repercussions for their relationship with the military. In addition there remains an association of seeking support and admitting weakness, which can be a challenging prospect. Even after all this, there has to be a reasonable relationship between the veteran and the family. Given the high incidence of previous partners with children, where the relationship between the adults' remains strained, this

adds a further potential complication in the families' awareness of potential support and the veteran's willingness to self-identify. The experiences of our participants indicated that any approach tended to be at crisis point and the sense that veterans were more 'comfortable' with requesting financial support, rather than emotional support. There are examples of good practice, with some prisons identifying specific workers with a specific responsibility to support veterans. There is a plethora of military charities, but few specifically support those who have offended. In September 2019, 'Focus On: Armed Forces Charities in the Criminal Justice System', funded by the Forces in Mind Trust² shows that just 31 of the UK's 1,888 Armed Forces charities provide criminal justice related support to 3,200 veterans each year. We question the usefulness of the term veteran and consider whether an alternative such as 'ex-Armed Service Personnel' (ex-ASP) or 'former member of the armed forces' would be more accessible to this group. Similarly, would reframing the services offered from support to something more like 'advice and guidance' remove some of the stigma that may be dissuading those in need. We would want to see more recognition from the military charities of this particularly complex group, specific outreach to partners and those caring for children of veterans in custody, and greater collaboration between support services and criminal justice agencies to ensure families are made aware of support available and to ensure robust assessment of their situations.

- **Participants would like to see peer support for both veterans inside prison and families outside in the community**

Peer support groups for veterans within custody have been reported as useful to veterans. We would like to see this specifically include family issues, recognised formally and replicated throughout the prison estate. Family members indicated through our study that no one had approached them to enquire how they were managing and some went on to say how they would appreciate the opportunity to talk with

others in similar circumstances. Peer support was raised by families as a way to offer each other support and guidance throughout their journey before, during and after custody. We would like to see how this model of peer support could be developed and tested for families of veterans in custody.

- **Feedback is positive when services are accessed in custody but family support is largely absent**

When challenges are overcome by individuals to ask for support and by agencies to make support available, the response from veterans was positive but rarely did this include a family dimension. To increase positive outcomes for veterans in custody and their families, consistent and effective support needs to be made available to veterans. This should start with profiled hours for Veteran in Custody Support Officers, providing adequate time, resources and training rather than relying on the passion and good will of individual staff. This support needs to extend to families to check in with their needs and ensure they are made aware of and linked up to appropriate support. One single agency must take the lead in coordinating the support and care of children whose parents are in custody.

- **Greatest challenge at point of release from custody**

After the increased anxiety due to the uncertainty of entering custody, many veterans find familiarity in the structure and stability of the prison environment. This provides an opportunity for services to engage with veterans at a time where they might be more able to respond. This uncertainty then builds up again in the run up to their release, where any support can rapidly fall away and the sudden change in daily routines and impact on family can be immensely stressful. Children and partners reported concern that should the veteran begin to show signs they were not managing, this was interpreted as a failure on their part.

2. Robson, et al. (2018)

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There are indications that a more planned release from custody with several episodes of Release on Temporary Licence was helpful to all family members. The question is posed to the MOD whether a similar approach is worth also considering and applying to serving Armed Forces personnel as part of a 1-2 year staged transition plan. This should take into account the needs of the whole family as they collectively prepare for civilian life.

- **Mental health was a consistent, often unspoken, need**

The most consistent issue vocalised by families was the financial impact of the imposition of a custodial sentence. Many families struggled to generate enough income and had to balance childcare with multiple jobs. Underneath practical and financial needs, there was an undercurrent of negative emotional impacts, of mothers working to hold the family together on the outside which made it almost impossible for them to reflect on the wider impact it was having on them. Similar to the veteran's attitudes of not wanting to show weakness, it appeared this was mirrored by partners. Even when there was some acknowledgement, there did not appear to be a clear path to take. Professionals in the community, teachers, GPs and charity workers need to be upskilled to identify and feel confident in asking questions to partners or children of parents in custody.

Recommendations

1. Military independence, not dependence

The culture of the military is at odds with civilian culture and this has implications for veterans and their families when they return to civilian society. Military personnel are trained and socialised into a collective mind-set where HM Armed Forces take responsibility for their day-to-day needs. This culture opposes the individual mind-set of civilian society. Due to the young age many people enter the military, they are not able to 'switch' back into a mentality that they have never developed and this conflicts

with the family, increasing the risk of family breakdown and potentially domestic abuse. We recommend that MOD put basic measures in place to facilitate more independent living and budgeting skills such as: paying for monthly rent and bills. We recognise that the Government's Veterans Strategy seeks to address this need, and welcome the work that is already underway ensure it is met.

2. Staged Transition

Transition or 'decompression' from and between military and civilian life, needs to encapsulate the psychological transition just as much as the logistical support required. This includes periodical transitions into/out of family life throughout service and the final transition out of the military. Improved communication between military and community services to facilitate this resettlement for both veterans and their families. The MOD should look to fund a specific service for dishonourable discharge due to the additional vulnerabilities the immediacy of this decision can have on veteran, their families and children. This could be delivered in collaboration with partner organisations.

3. Family preparation

Education and training to be provided to families of military personnel to understand military life and vice versa for military personnel. Training should start whilst serving and cover the impact of military life and transition into civilian life, including possible needs and support services available. Relationship support should be funded by the military to couples (married or not) throughout their service and years following their return to civilian life.

4. Alcohol

Further research into the prevalence, context and support around alcohol misuse within the Forces and the impact this has on families and children. Re-framing and education around the definition of 'problematic alcohol use' in relation to the wider impact alcohol use and ensuing behaviour has on military personnel/veterans and their family and children.

5. Training

Public and third sector professionals that come into contact with veterans and/or their families (e.g. schools, GPs, third sector agencies) to receive training (such as 'Military Human' training³ programme or alternatives), to ensure wide understanding of the specific culture of military life, transition and possible difficulties. This training must include experiences of families and children and details of support available. Due to the identified complexity of need, it is essential that safeguarding training is provided to ensure child protection issues are monitored and reported.

6. Language

Changing the language used around 'veterans' to 'ex-Armed Service Personnel' in acknowledgement that many British veterans do not identify as 'veterans' and this may preclude them and their family from receiving support. The use of the word 'support' should also be reviewed by services as it seems to create a barrier due to the ideas of weakness that many 'veterans' and family members attach to the word.

7. VICSO Services with profiled hours

Each prison to provide a Veteran in Custody Support Officer with profiled hours dedicated to this role. This could be across several members of staff to ensure consistent support via veteran forums, veteran representatives and external charities. This commitment to profiled hours should include joint and recorded work with Family Engagement Workers (FEWs), outreach to families and standard training, covering family work topics such as safeguarding, domestic abuse and parenting. There is also positive work to be done joining up veteran services within regions and VICSO support across the UK, offering spaces to network, mutual support and share best practice.

8. "Familiar but not comfortable environments"

Providing spaces for veterans which offer the opportunity to reconnect with their military past but also prepare them for their return to the community. Separate veteran wings are a positive initiative at larger estates, or a regional wing for several smaller estates. This includes continuing to build on the peer support already available for veterans in custody but also creating opportunities for family peer support, for instance, making use of visitor's centres to provide support groups. Those in formal peer support roles should have access to regular and robust training relevant to their role, including safeguarding/family work.

9. Asking questions, recording answers

Family circumstances to form part of standard assessments for veterans in custody, by both prison (VICSO, veteran representatives, and key workers) and charity professionals. Once this data is recorded, it is measurable and a clearer picture of needs and what support is on offer/being accessed can be established.

10. Holistic practice

To ensure children and family members' needs and wellbeing are supported and safeguarded, we recommend one organisation takes the lead in coordinating support for the family and/or children with a parent in prison. For veterans' families, there is huge value to specialist support where the nuances of military culture are understood alongside expertise in family work. This whole-family approach to work needs to be assertive and not just sign posting, offering ongoing emotional as well as practical support. This should include taking advantage of existing opportunities/materials⁴ and creating new strategies to raise awareness of family support available and services pro-actively engaging with families.

3 <https://www.yorks.ac.uk/courses/professional-and-short-courses/military-human/the-military-human-military-culture-transition/>

4 <https://www.nicco.org.uk/directory-of-resources>

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11. Shared Learning

There is a key opportunity for the MOD and HMPPS to share learning and strategies around military and custodial resettlement. Adopting strategies which consider the practical and psychological impact for veterans and their families, with an opportunity for gradual re-integration back into family life and to increase the chances of positive family relationships in the community.

12. Joint 'through the gate' practice

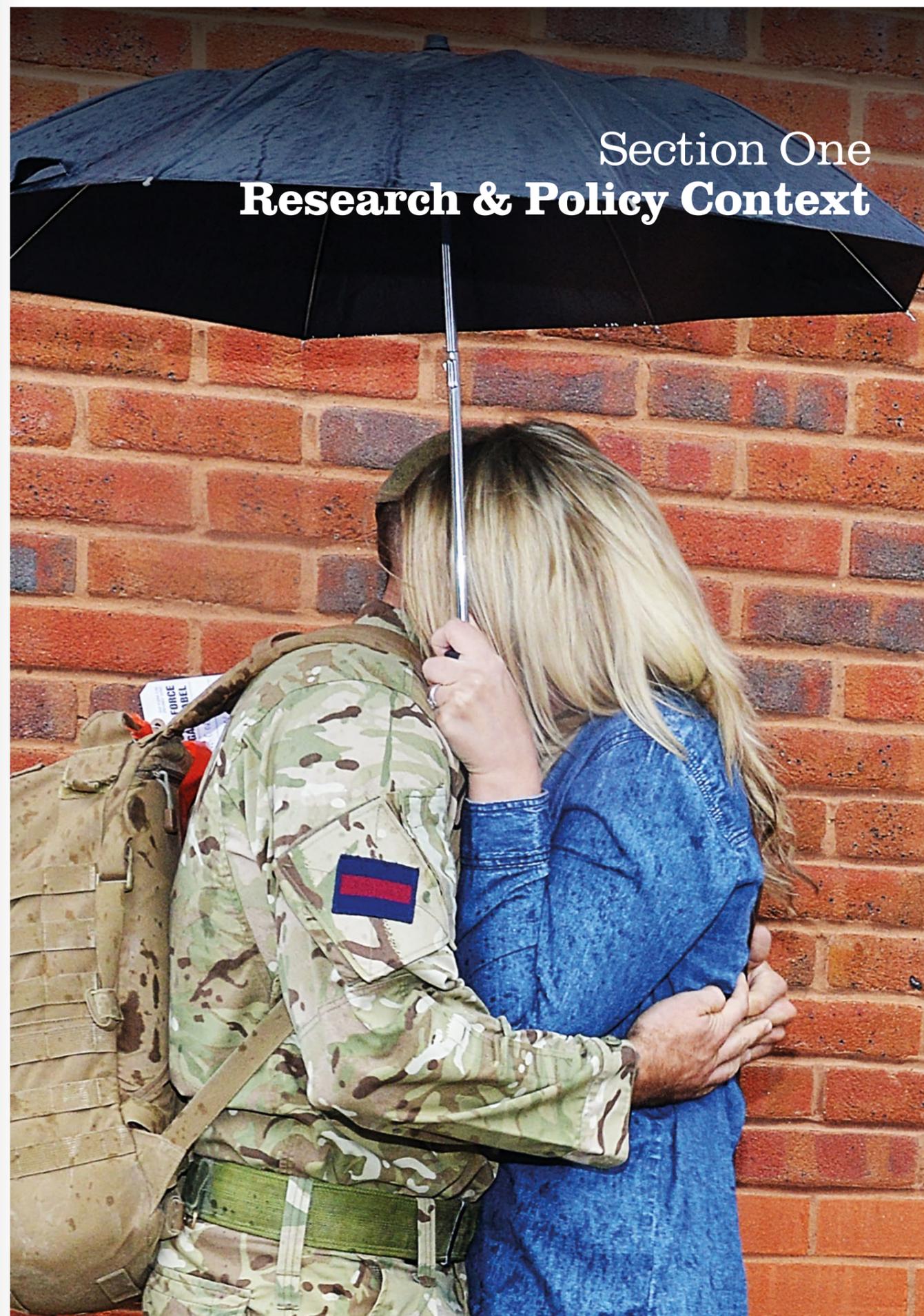
This would be reinforced by established VICSO services with profiled hours (Recommendation 7), enabling VICSOs to offer formalised support for veterans between custody and the community. This coordinated support should extend to families by joint working with and between probation, regional Armed Forces Covenant groups, the police, military charities, children's services and/or other community services/specialist support. This multi-agency working ensures clear communication and shared support planning, acknowledging the expertise and role of each agency.

13. Paid opportunities for peer support

Military charities offering paid roles for veterans released from custody to provide support/mentoring to veterans in custody. This would increase representation of Service experience in military charities and ensure consistency of services, training and documentation across regions.

14. Continued research

In acknowledgement of the limited information we have on the experiences of families post-release, further research should be undertaken to understand the short and long-term impacts of criminal justice on families and family relationships when the veteran parent returns home.



Section One

Research & Policy Context

As part of this needs assessment, a thorough review of current literature was undertaken to evidence the need for further research (see bibliography for a full reference list). In this section, we consider the existing policy context and a summarised version of the literature review.

1.1 Policy Context

It has only been in recent years that the support and care of veterans and those leaving HM Armed Forces has been formalised into government policy. The Armed Forces Covenant (2011) a promise from the nation that those who serve or have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly⁵. Now every Local Authority on the British mainland has signed it, in support of their veteran communities (Ministry of Defence, 2016).

In 2014 a review was conducted by Lord Ashcroft to determine what improvements could be made to the provision for those leaving the Armed Forces and their transition to 'civvy' street. He recommended improved co-ordination of information on voluntary sector support for veterans. As a result, the MOD has created a Service Leavers Guide (2018), detailing support for immediate transition and beyond; in which numerous helpline numbers and websites for charities are listed, including the 'Veterans' Gateway'⁶. Assessment tools have also been developed, such as HARDFACTs⁷, and are used by the military as well as community agencies to support veterans in transitioning.

In Lord Ashcroft's review it was recognised that some veterans struggle with transition. Previously in 2009, the MOD and the National Offender Management Service formalised a support service for Veterans in Custody (the VICs scheme). This initiative was developed by Mr Nick Wood, a veteran who, at the time, was a serving prison officer. The establishment of the VICs scheme lead to the development of a guide to supporting ex-Armed Service Personnel in custody with a guide to support its implementation (Phillips, 2014). However, as this was government guidance rather than legislation the scheme has not been established consistently across all prisons. At the most recent count, 80 out of the 118 prison estates in the UK have an established VICs scheme⁸.

In the same year as Lord Ashcroft's review, a government review of veterans in the criminal justice system was undertaken by Stephen Phillips QC MP (2014). Among the many recommendations made, the need to capture and record whether an offender served in the Armed Forces at every professional intervention in the criminal justice system was highlighted. Following this report, it was included as standard on the Basic Custody Screening Tool for newly arrived offenders across all prison estates (MOJ, 2015).

In 2018, the government's 'Strategy for our Veterans'⁹ identified 'Veterans and the Law' as a key area in which veterans need support. The strategy document acknowledges that those veterans that do enter the criminal justice system are often the most vulnerable and present with complex needs.

5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/armed-forces-covenant-supporting-information>

6. <https://www.veteransgateway.org.uk/>

7. <https://www.army.mod.uk/personnel-and-welfare/service-leavers-veterans/transition-to-civilian-life/>

8. Information provided by the HMPPS Co-Financing Organisation on 08/11/19.

9. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/755915/Strategy_for_our_Veterans_FINAL_08.11.18_WEB.pdf

1.2 Research Context

1.2.1 Offending and Family Ties

There is increasing evidence relating to the importance of family ties in supporting the rehabilitation of offenders and reduction in the risk of reoffending (Markson et al, 2015; Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017 and Lord Farmer, 2017). Lord Farmer stated that positive contact with friends and families is 'key to rehabilitation and reducing intergenerational offending' (2017:18).

In addition to this, there is a growing body of research concerned with the impact of offending on families. Glover (2009) explains the challenges faced by children with a father in prison are greater than those faced by the parent left behind, because not only are they facing the stigma and the reduction in finances but they also take on a support role to that parent, face bullying and have to wrestle with emotions pertaining to grief and anger. Rosenberg (2009) reflects on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child when discussing the child's rights to have contact with their imprisoned parent, as long as it is in the child's best interest; but also highlights that paternal involvement in a child's life can benefit the child's development. This is reiterated by the Centre for Social Justice (2017:6) highlighting the links between 'active father engagement and improved childhood outcomes, particularly educational achievement'.

Losing a parent to the criminal justice system constitutes an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE's) and can affect a family's financial wellbeing, housing, relationships, childcare arrangements and often leads to increased sense of stigma and isolation (Sutherland and Wright, 2017). In the context of ACE's, a review by Murray & Farrington (2005) found that 65% of prisoners' sons went on to offend themselves; highlighting an intergenerational cycle element to offending and the ongoing impact on HMPPS services. Further research has demonstrated a significant impact on: school attendance and attainment (Clewett & Glover, 2009) children's mental health (Jones & Wainaina-Wozna, 2013),

financial wellbeing (Smith et al., 2007), and social isolation (Jones & Wainaina-Wozna, 2013; Smith et al, 2007). Therefore, there is evidence that a reciprocal benefit exists to families, particularly children, visiting fathers in prison (Fair & Jacobson, 2016).

1.2.2 Veterans in Custody

Although the majority of veterans will transition out of the military successfully, there is a small cohort who become involved in the criminal justice system. Former members of the Armed Forces constitute one of the largest occupational groupings in prisons in the UK (The Howard League for Penal Reform [HLPR], 2011) with estimates of between 3.5% (DASA, 2010) and 6% (HMIP, 2014) of the prison population. Between 2012 and 2019, based on 190 reports collected from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 6.07% of the male prison population identified as ex-Armed Forces¹⁰. As a result there has been a significant amount of academic interest into the characteristics and needs of this particular group, as well as evidence gathered through the delivery of veteran-targeted support programmes in custody¹¹.

Problems with social exclusion and isolation, finance and alcohol issues have been cited (HLPR, 2011) as triggering a downward spiral into criminality. Early childhood trauma, difficulties during service (e.g. physical or mental health issues) and/or problems post-Forces are evident amongst veterans in custody (HLPR, 2011; HMIP, 2014).

There are significantly higher numbers of veterans serving longer sentences for violent or sexually related crimes than the general offender population (MacManus et al, 2013; Fossey et al, 2017; Kelly, 2014; HLPR, 2011).

10. Based on analysis conducted by Steve Lowe of Project Nova; the question asked by HMIP was not specific to HM Armed Forces, so is likely to include veterans from outside the UK.

11. Such as the SToMP project in Wales, The Phoenix Project delivered by Care after Combat, Project Nova in the North/North East of England.

Section One Research & Policy Context

Alcohol misuse has been linked as a contributory factor to violent crime (Lyne & Packham, 2014) and lower military rank a predictor (MacManus et al, 2013). Poor mental health, particularly depression, is also worsened by alcohol misuse (Phillips, 2014) and large numbers of veterans present with symptoms of poor mental health on entry to prison with higher numbers reporting suicidal thoughts (HMIP, 2014) than the general prison population. Higher levels of other mental health issues such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are also prevalent within the veteran prison population (Lyne & Packham, 2014).

1.2.3 The Military and Family Relationships

There is some evidence that highlights the challenges associated with maintaining family relationships for active Service men and women (Fossey et al, 2017 and HLPR, 2011). Although these studies do not refer to the additional pressure of separation once a veteran is serving a custodial sentence. Phillips' (2014) review also highlighted the incidences of domestic violence within veteran families and stated 'families pay a price for service by their loved ones in the Armed Forces. For some, that price clearly continues once service has come to an end' (2014:13).

A small number of studies have touched on the role of family in transition for veterans and their part in mitigating the risk of poor mental health or alcohol misuse (The Futures Company, 2013; Centre for Social Justice, 2016). The impact of transition out of the military on families, in terms of financial wellbeing, school experience and mental health has also been reported (Diehle et al, 2016; Fear et al, 2018; Albertson et al, 2017).

More recently, the mental health experiences of partners of veterans suffering from military PTSD have been evidenced in research (Murphy et al., 2016) and subsequent treatment programmes such as 'The Together Programme'¹² run by Combat Stress.

12. <https://www.combatstress.org.uk/file/6680/download?token=IIfK9EYc>

1.2.4 Veterans in Custody and their Families

There is limited research regarding the family-support needs of veterans in custody and their families. One of the only references to the needs of families is cited in the report by the Howard League for Penal Reform (2011:49) in a case study on the charity Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA): 'the charity suggested to the inquiry that the problems which SSAFA have identified through their prison work appear to be as much to do with the families left at home, as a result of former service personnel offending, as with the needs of the prisoners themselves.' There is no further detail provided however, about the nature of the families' needs.

1.2.5 Support Available

There is a significant amount of support available to veterans from a myriad of Armed Forces and veterans' charities. A small number of charities provide services to veterans in custody (Cooper et al., 2018). However, this is not uniformly delivered across the prison estate (HMIP, 2014) and it is potentially on the decline (Robson, Cole & Doherty, 2019). Both The Royal British Legion (RBL) and the SSAFA provide support to families while veterans are in prison. Additionally, there are several smaller local charities, some of which were formed in response to the Armed Forces Covenant; but their remits generally cover a small geographic area. They work similarly to provide individualised support to meet the needs of the veteran and in some cases those of the family too. These charities will only work with a veteran (and their families where applicable) once their service record has been verified (Phillips, 2014).

Issues around identification (Phillips, 2014, HMIP, 2014), pride (Fossey et al, 2017: HLPR, 2011), lack of awareness and stigma (The Futures Company, 2013) have been argued to be significant barriers to veterans and their families accessing available support.

Section Two Methodology



Section Two Methodology

2.1 Methods

From July 2018 – February 2020, Forces in Mind Trust funded Barnardo's to undertake a needs assessment of veterans in custody, their families and children. Two research officers were employed to work on this project, with one taking the lead in conducting, analysing and writing up the research.

Research was focussed in the South West and West Midlands, covering a variety of prison categories and types (local remand prisons, open prisons and sexual offender prison estates). This geographical remit was in part due to Barnardo's pre-existing links with prisons in these regions, but mainly due to the time and resource restrictions on the project. However, it was decided that where relevant work specific to the themes of the project was identified outside of these regions, we would undertake a limited number of interviews with participants.

This needs assessment is predominantly a qualitative analysis of data collected utilising a mixed methodology. A desk based literature review was conducted to support ethical applications. We used semi-structured interviews to consult with participants (Appendix 2). Interviews with children were adapted according to their age, and participatory research methods (Appendix 3) were used to provide a safe and indirect way for young children to talk about their experiences. In addition to interviews, our Research Officers attended various professional meetings and veterans forums within prison estates. This enabled wider understanding of the topic and observation of work in practice to support veterans in custody/community, their families and children.

The project was overseen by an expert steering group, made up of senior professionals from public and charity sector agencies, including HMPPS (see Appendix 1 for full list). From September 2018 – December 2019, we met on 7 occasions to seek support, advice and expertise from our members. Our methods of identification, research methods and

recruitment material were approved by our members, and where possible, members coordinated consultation with frontline practitioners and veterans in custody. Our findings were shared at regular intervals with the whole steering group and final report draft sent to a select number of members for feedback before being finalised.

All interviews were anonymised (using coding) and audio recorded with written consent from participants and transcribed verbatim. Notes from informal discussions were also recorded such as veteran forums, and researcher's reflections included as part of our data. A thematic analysis was undertaken while data collection continued and then final themes collated at the end of this period utilising NVIVO software. A quantitative analysis was conducted of the quantifiable data received from interviews to act as a baseline for the discussion such as participant demographics, levels of contact, level of need and support accessed. Five case studies demonstrating the good practice of specific agencies have also been included throughout the report.

2.2 Sample

Sampling was subject to the following set of inclusion criteria for the needs assessment:

- Veterans who are serving, or who have recently completed, a custodial sentence in prison, who have children under the age of 18 and who have permitted contact with those children under the terms of their sentence and/or under the terms of any children's services involvement; whether they have contact or not.
- Current or ex-partners of veterans that meet the criteria above as long as they are the primary care-giver of the veterans' child(ren).
- Children from 5-18yrs whose father has served for a period of time previously in HM Armed Forces and also serving or has served recently a custodial sentence in prison.

- Professionals working in public and third sector agencies that either work specifically with or come into regular contact with veterans in the criminal justice system and/or their families.

We adopted multiple strategies to identify potential participants. For veteran participants, our main method of identification was via VICSOs and in a small number of cases, community services/military charity professionals. For families and veterans in the community, we developed recruitment material (leaflets and posters) which were sent to community/prison services to advertise in direct access areas and/or to pass onto service users. We also advertised the research online via the NICCO website and Veteran's Gateway as well as in the Inside Times. We attended a select number of prison visits centres in person to advertise the research and identify potential candidates. Despite these alternative methods, family members were predominantly identified following interviews with the father.

As aforementioned, our primary geographical focus was within the South West and West Midlands. However, during the course of the research, in response to challenges in identifying participants and a desire to capture best practice, a small number of interviews were conducted with families and professionals outside of these areas, in Wales and the North West.

Our final sample breakdown (section 3 will explore their characteristics in more detail) was:

- **18 veterans** in total were interviewed, 16 serving custodial sentences and 2 based in the community, released within the last 12 months
- **5 partners**
 - all were in current relationships with the father;
 - for 4 of the partners, their partner was also interviewed and included in our veteran sample;

- for 4 of the partners interviewed, their children were also interviewed and included in our sample

- **5 children** were interviewed
 - 3 individual interviews and 1 joint interview with two siblings
 - all were the biological children of the father in custody/recently released
 - all 5 children would consider their father as their primary male caregiver
- **25 professionals** from a range of community/criminal justice agencies, from practitioner to senior management. This included 2 Veteran Representatives (veterans serving custodial sentences acting as peer mentors) who were interviewed in relation to their roles and were not eligible for the veteran sample.
- A total of 19 prisons were contacted in the South West and West Midlands, and 1 in Wales. 16 of these prisons responded and provided a point of contact for our researchers to liaise with. Interviews were conducted in 9 of these prisons and significant contact was made with a further 4 (including interviewing professionals, attending veteran forums/visitors centres) but did not result in veteran/family interviews¹³.
- We did not conduct any formal focus groups as was initially intended. Instead, we attended veteran forums on 4 occasions across 4 prisons and facilitated an informal discussion, noting down generalised comments and observations by hand. Two of these forums were for veterans classed as 'vulnerable prisoners' (predominantly convicted of sexual offences or in sexual offender prisons) and 2 for veterans based in the main prison estate.

13. This was generally due to the VICSO reporting that there were no veterans currently in their estate or that the veterans in custody were not eligible or not willing to engage.

Section Two Methodology

The vast majority of the interviews were face-to-face interviews, with a small number completed via telephone. We did also publish online surveys as an option to participate. However, there was only 1 response received, which was incomplete and not included in our sample.

Prior to commencing interviews, we conducted a pilot interview with a veteran father and his partner. Neither fulfilled the eligibility criteria so were not included in the final sample, but provided feedback on the interview structure and questions.

2.3 Limitations and Challenges

All the veterans interviewed identified themselves as such at some point in their criminal justice journey and therefore we were only able to obtain anecdotal reasoning for non-identification.

Acknowledging existing research findings that sexual offences make up a high proportion of offences committed by veterans in custody, our criteria for fathers to have 'permitted' contact with their children significantly restricts the participation of veterans convicted for sexual offences in our study as it is reasonable to assume that many will have child contact restrictions in place. However, it is important to note that a small number of veterans without permitted contact with some or all their children are included in our sample, as this information transpired throughout the course of the interviews.

Our study is also limited by its focus on the male HMP estate only. Whilst we acknowledge that there are also veterans in the women's estate, the majority of veterans in custody are in the male estate and the restricted resource and time allocated to this project dictated that the study would focus on the male estate only.

All the prisons in which interviews were undertaken had an identified member of staff who worked with veterans as part of their role, a VICSO. In all but one case this was a prison officer who was a veteran themselves;

the remaining prison had a health care worker who was the wife and mother of armed forces personnel. This therefore indicates that some offer of support to veterans was available in each of these establishments. One prison contacted that did not have a VICSO stated that they did not have any identified veterans. It is possible that the absence of a VICSO or any identified support might deter veterans from identifying themselves.

In terms of 'family relationships' this research focuses solely on the nuclear family unit (i.e. parents and children) and is not exploring the impact on extended family relationships which may also support successful rehabilitation such as siblings of veterans in custody.

Most of the children interviewed had been born after their father had left the Armed Forces and therefore could only really relate to the absence of their father while he served a custodial sentence.

Although it was not a requisite in terms of our eligibility criteria, all the veterans and partners interviewed referred to being in heterosexual relationships. We did not include a question around sexuality as part of our interview so we cannot concretely state that all our interviewees identified as heterosexual.

In a large number of cases the veterans in custody who were interviewed had experienced relationship breakdown. Therefore, it was difficult to make contact with former partners and children of a number of the veteran participants. This can be seen as an indicative outcome as well as a limitation and something that will be discussed further in the following sections. As a result, the sample of partners and children included in this report are all from families who would describe themselves as being 'together'.

The lack of publicity by some agencies, particularly military charities, to advertise their criminal justice work made it difficult to identify

those that worked specifically with veterans in custody, in order that we might interview them. This therefore was not only a barrier to our researchers but potentially to veteran families seeking support or to VICSOs supporting veterans in custody to identify external support.

Finally, all Barnardo's professionals involved in this research, including two research officers, were white females, aged between 30 – 50 years old. Neither researcher had direct military experience. These personal attributes are likely to have impacted the information given by participants.

2.4 Ethics

In order to undertake this research, we complied with internal and external ethical processes including: Barnardo's Research Ethics Committee, the National Research Council for HMPPS and Help for Heroes.



Section Three Characteristics of our sample of Veterans in Custody, their Families and Children



Section Three Characteristics of our sample of Veterans in Custody, their Families and Children

In this section, we provide a breakdown of the characteristics of our interview sample of veterans in custody (16)¹⁴, ex-offender veterans in the community (2), partners (5) and children (5). The aim of this section is to focus on outlining the demographic make-up of our sample who informed the findings of this research.

3.1 Age, ethnicity and identified disability of veterans, partners and children

- Veteran ages: 21-30 (4), 31-40 (9) and 41-50 (5)
- Partners' ages: 21-30 (1), 31-40 (2) and 41-50 (2)
- Childrens' ages: 5-10 (4) and 11-15 (1)
- In terms of ethnicity, veterans identified as: White British (12), British (1), White Welsh (1), Mixed (2), Black British (1) and Fijian (1).
- All partners and children interviewed identified as White British
- 12 veterans did not identify as having a disability (mental and physical) and 8 did (3 x PTSD, 3 x dyslexia, 1 x partial hearing, 1 x PTSD and emotionally unstable personality disorder). However, 8 out of the 12 who initially answered 'no' made reference to experiencing depression, anxiety and undiagnosed symptoms of PTSD (sleep problems, flashbacks and nightmares) through the course of the consultation. Only 5 reported to have experienced no mental health issues.

14. This does not include one veteran who was not interviewed himself, but his partner was interviewed. This additional veteran is only included when referring to the children/family e.g. when discussing levels of contact.

- None of the partners or children interviewed identified as having a disability. However, one child identified as having a diagnosis of anxiety through the course of the interview.

3.2 Family Breakdown was common, with veterans having multiple children by multiple partners.

- 9 out of 18 veterans identified as 'single', 4 as 'partner', 2 'divorced' and 3 'married'. 4 out of those identified as 'single', advised during the interview that they have partners.
- 47 children in total were disclosed, ranging from 0 – 26 years old with all but one veteran fathering between 2-3 children (exception of one veteran with 5 children). This includes 4 step-children and children with ex-partner(s).
- In terms of the criteria for this research, 43 children were between 0-18 years old, including 4 step-children.
- At the time of writing¹⁵, 11 or 26% of the 43 children, (including 2 step-children) were reported to live or expected to live at home with the veteran in custody on their release. Based on biological children (39) only 9 or 23% of children reported by our sample lived or expected to live at home with both parents and these were all aged 2 – 13 years old. It is interesting to note that this is much lower than the figures reported in the UK, where the OECD reports that two thirds or 66% of children aged 0-14 years old live with both parents¹⁶.

15. 2 children were not included as their father had been released and currently living away from their home whilst undergoing a social services assessment. If successful, the plan was for him to return to the family home.

16. Lord Farmer (2019). *The Golden Thread? Families, Prisons and Therapeutic Communities in Prison Service Journal*, 241: 3-10, Pg. 4

Section Three

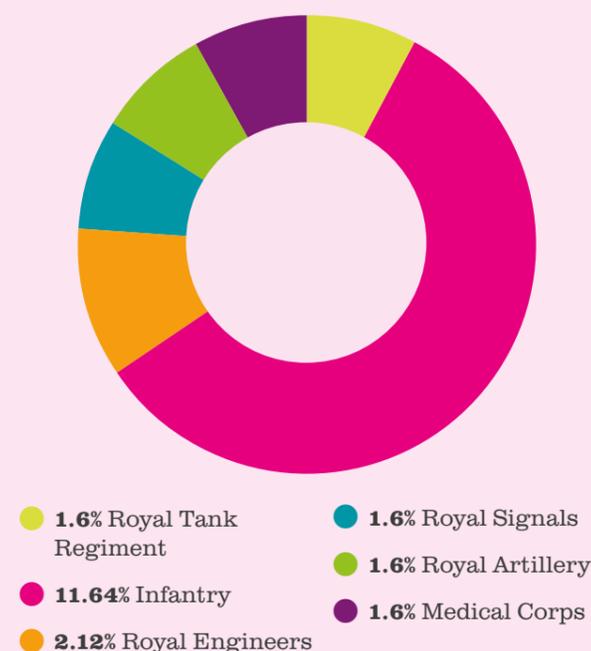
Characteristics of our sample of Veterans in Custody, their Families and Children

- 33 children were reported to have a significant¹⁷ amount of contact with their father prior to their custodial sentence, and 29 were reported to expect a similar level of contact to resume once their father was released. This includes 5 children whose fathers were already released and at home (3) or having regular supervised contact whilst a social services assessment was being completed (2).

- 17 served in The Army, 1 in the Royal Air Force and 0 in the Royal Navy¹⁸. Infantry were by far the majority and the highest rank reached was Sergeant.
- 12 completed operational tours, completing between 1 and 6+, including Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, Sierra Leone, Congo, Afghanistan and Syria. 6 did not see active combat.
- 2 of the veterans interviewed lived on military barracks with their families. The families of the remaining 16, lived in the civilian community with the veteran visiting in varying levels of frequency depending on whether the family was still together at the time and the location of their work in the UK/abroad.

3.3 All but one veteran interviewed served in The Army, with an average length of service of 7 years.

Diagram 1: Breakdown of regiments served for participants who served in The Army



3.4 On average, the length of military service was 7 years, with an average of 6.9 years between leaving the military and serving their custodial sentence.

- Length of service ranged from 2 – 22 years, with an average of 7 years.
- Reasons for leaving the military came under:
 - Dishonourable discharge (7): drugs, violence, going absent without leave (or AWOL) to escape charges or to avoid going back on tour.
 - Voluntary resignation (6): focussing on new family/partner, lack of promotion in the Forces, lack of active combat.
 - Redundancy (1)
 - Medical Discharge (2)
 - Administrative Discharge (2)

18. This high number of Army veterans is reflected in existing research, such as HLP (2011) which found identified veterans across the prison estate were largely ex-Army (77%), followed by 15% Royal Navy and 8% Royal Air Force.

- 6 would be classed as ‘Early Service Leavers’, serving 4 years or less.
- Time between discharge and custody ranged from 1 veteran being sentenced days after leaving the military, and 1 entering custody 26yrs after leaving.

3.5 The majority were serving their first custodial sentence and offences came under three categories: violence against the person, sexual offences and drug offences.

- Majority (10) of offences were violence against the person (section 18, section 20, firearms or stalking & harassment), drug offences (4, 1 combined with section 20) and sexual offences (3).
- 11 out of the 18, or 61%, were first time offenders. This is much higher than the general prison population where first time offenders account for less than 8% of the prison population in England and Wales¹⁹.
- 4 reported serving 2 or more previous custodial sentences.
- 3 reported committing crime when they were younger but with no criminal convictions.
- 3 veterans reported serving time in the Military Corrective Training Centre²⁰. Out of these 3, two were detained for 28 days for being AWOL and the third was detained briefly before being moved to civilian prison. All three were discharged from the military following their detention.

19. <https://www.civitas.org.uk/content/files/whogoestoprison.pdf>

20. A detention centre providing corrective training for servicemen and women who have violated military rules, in some cases this may lead to a civil conviction where detainees will be discharged from the military and moved to a civilian prison.

3.6 Contact with children in custody

- 14 out of 18 veterans had contact with at least one of their children during their custodial sentence. This included face-to-face visits, phone calls and/or letters.
- 25 out of 43 children had face-to-face contact with their fathers/step-fathers at some point during their custodial sentence. This ranged from weekly face-to-face visits or once or twice a month/year. For children of ex-partners, these visits were facilitated by the ex-partner themselves, paternal grandparents or the father’s current partner.
- Phone contact was the most frequently and widely used method of contact, with 32 out of 43 children receiving phone and/or letter contact (including all 25 who received face-to-face contact).
- It was reported that 12 children (including 1 step-child) did not have any contact with their father/step-father. The reasons given for this included: relationship breakdown with the mother, short sentence length, difficulties in arranging visits (communication, finances) or uncertainty regarding permitted contact (this was often unclear to the father).

17. Significant here refers to regular and extended periods of contact.

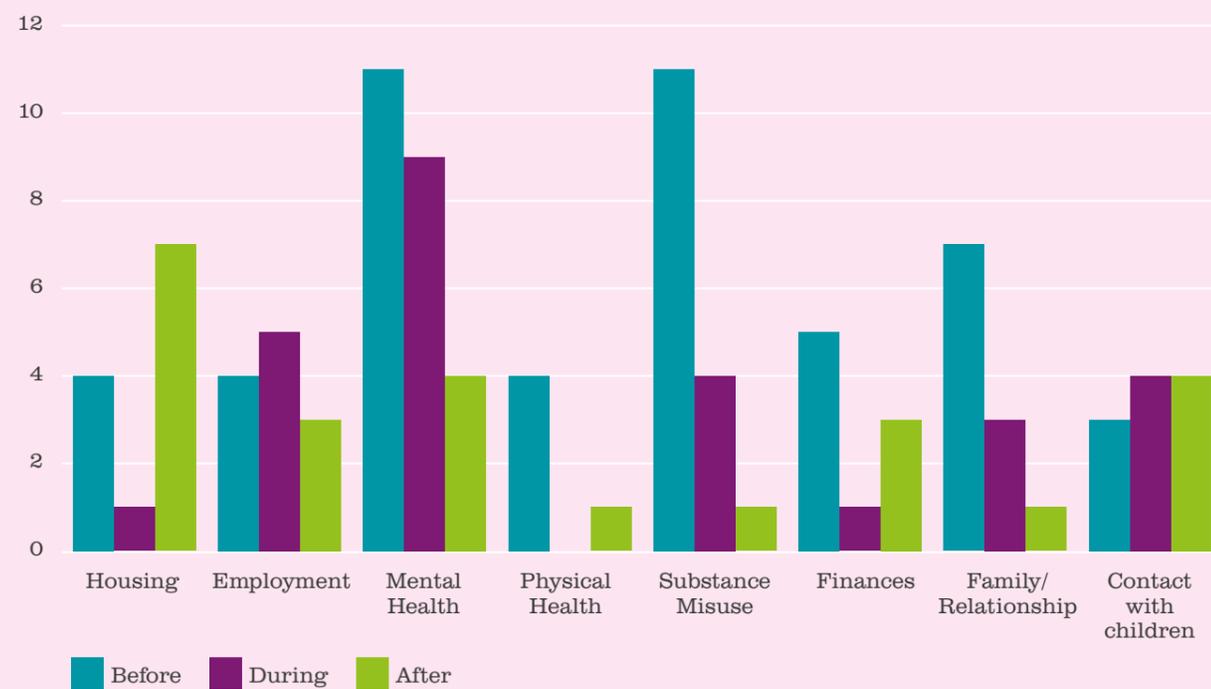
Section Three

Characteristics of our sample of Veterans in Custody, their Families and Children

3.7 Overview of veteran support needs before, during and after custody

- The needs of veterans at different stages of the criminal justice system will be discussed in detail throughout this report. This diagram provides a comparative overview of needs before, during and after custody.

Diagram 2: Support needs overall



Section Four Needs of veterans, families and children – BEFORE custody



Section Four Needs of veterans, families and children – BEFORE custody

The primary focus of this section is the spiral into custody and the needs of veterans/families during this time. For the 18 veterans, this spiral occurred many years after leaving the military and the families and children were not present during the veteran's military service. However, we start by briefly reflecting on the veterans' childhoods, their decisions to join the military and experiences of the military which continued into their transition to civilian life. Much of what is discussed corroborates existing research and intends to set the framework for understanding how veterans past experiences go onto impact their family and children.

4.1 The decision to join

All veterans interviewed, including those in a professional capacity, cited family connection as a key motivating factor for joining the military. For example, having a father, grandfather or brother in the military or related profession (e.g. police force).

Veterans referred to the military providing 'direction', a sense of purpose and belonging.

"I did lack direction as a youngster and with that lack of direction, I didn't know where to go, what to do and in the end, I thought, 'Do you know what – Army.' Where a lot of young adults would end up going if they feel they haven't got anywhere to belong."

(Veteran in Custody)

The majority entered the military between the ages of 15 and 19 years old. The military was described as offering job security and career progression not generally available in other forms of employment. This was also expressed in terms of identity; that this employment was unique in offering a sense of pride and respect.

"I've never really found anything that gave me the same all-round good feeling about myself, and also I don't think I've ever met an employer that invests in you the way the military does. You know the military gets you through the door and says no matter who you are you've got the same chance as anyone else..."

(Veteran in Custody)

"...it's a sense of purpose isn't it, for me anyway, and I think it's probably the same for a lot of the blokes. Put the uniform on and you feel like a superhero... you walk straight, stand up chest out, it's pride isn't it."

(Veteran in Custody)

"It was something to be proud of, everybody was proud of you, everything...you were proud of it, even though it was hard."

(Veteran in Custody)

Many veterans referred to joining the military as an active decision to avoid going down the 'wrong path'. For most, this was in response to a lack of employment opportunities, and high levels of violence, criminality and/or substance misuse in their wider community.

Section Four

Needs of veterans, families and children – BEFORE custody

“...I think I felt myself going so far off the rails at a young age, I was already starting to break the law and get up to no good. Although I hadn’t been arrested or caught, I was getting very close to that. I thought ‘I really can’t go down this road’ so I made the choice at 18 to join the forces.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“I was kind of mixing in with the wrong crowd, I think I was a bit more intelligent and didn’t really want to go the road that they were going down because we went from building dens and playing football in the street, making go-carts together to as we got older started robbing post offices and things, it started escalating, so I got out of there as quick as I could, away from my mum, to start a new life.”

(Veteran in Custody)

A small number of veterans referred to personally being involved in criminality from a young age as well as adverse experiences in the family home such as divorce, alcoholism, childhood abuse, domestic abuse and parental loss. In cases where these issues were identified, they were often minimalised and perceived as ‘normal’. This may have led to other veterans not considering it worthy of mentioning, and therefore this information would not have been captured in this research.

“Childhood weren’t bad, my dad were, I used to get battered by my dad...not just get hit with hands, I got hit with all sorts... my mum left my dad when I were...about 11 or 12. Because my dad used to beat my mum up so enough were enough, she had enough.”

(Ex-offender Veteran in the Community)

“I think for me really, it was getting out of home, it was getting away, it gave me everything, it gave me a place to live, money, skills, it covered everything.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“It’s always been difficult for me growing up cos I’ve grown up around domestics with my mum. She was in between blokes here, blokes there and we was moving around. I always grew up around drink, drugs and domestic... I took myself away from that joining the Army.”

(Veteran in Custody)

Joining the military to escape difficult home or community life was raised by a VICSO, a veteran himself:

“...they’re recruiting, a lot of people that come through here [prison]...are infantry and they’re from up north, a lot of them join the armed forces up there to escape the law, to escape deprivation from where they were living etc.”

(Professional)

From this perspective, for those veterans who have experienced difficulties throughout their childhood, the military can act as a positive decision to take them away from situations which are likely to lead to negative or criminal activity. It is important to highlight the MOD’s duty of care to assess the needs of new recruits in order to offer ongoing support and accountability throughout and beyond their military service. For example, research²¹ has shown that if a member of the Armed Forces has experienced violence in their childhood and adolescence, and has then gone on to perpetrate violence pre-enlistment, they are more likely to carry that through to discharge, particularly as the military have utilised those tendencies and honed them to become combat-ready.

21. Banks & Alberston, 2017; MacManus et al, 2013.

4.2 The first transition – military to civilian life

Veteran and families’ experiences of the transition from military to civilian life varied widely depending on factors such as: length of military service, reason for leaving the military and the length of time in between leaving and entering the CJS. Although the wide variety of experiences makes it hard to generalise, there were shared themes in relation to what they missed from military life, the impact of military socialisation and how their expectations met with the reality of civilian life. Many of the families were not present when the father left the military but nonetheless, they were impacted by many of the legacies of military life.

4.2.1 ‘Family’ bonds

Veterans reported that the military provided a sense of camaraderie and ‘family’ for them and this was lost when leaving the military. This ranged from the familiarity of military language and humour to the trust and bond held between military personnel.

“I miss everything, I miss my friends, I miss having a purpose, definitely having a purpose...I miss the camaraderie, miss having someone to talk to, I miss having... I just miss having that brotherhood...”

(Veteran in Custody)

“I miss so much – the camaraderie, something about the lads in the forces, you do form this brotherhood and it is used a lot, a brotherhood of the people.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“...that level of trust...I knew that everybody that was going through a door behind me or coming out of a vehicle behind me, was behind me, I did not need to look back. I’ve not had that feeling for a long time”

(Veteran in Custody)

However, this loss of military ‘family’ was often paralleled with the gain of a biological family upon leaving. Family, in a biological sense, was frequently cited as a key reason for deciding to leave the military, generally in relation to spending less time away from the family home.

“I personally believe I think I just was missing out on what everyone else was doing and I was never at home, never at home. Obviously I had my kids and that and I was rarely at home and when I did have weekends off I didn’t used to go home anyway to be honest, I used to just stay at camp and get drunk to be honest, it’s part of life in the army. And then I’d get it in the neck and then it would just deter me from going home even more, and then just, don’t know, I don’t know what led me to leave. I think it’s probably because I wanted to be a proper dad and then when I left I didn’t know how to be a proper dad anyway you know...”

(Veteran in Custody)

This apparent benefit of leaving is interesting considering these families often fell apart, some quite rapidly following the father’s departure from the military. Other, perhaps more negative, reasons for leaving included (and often overlapped); redundancy, limited progression, lack of combat, too much combat or being forced to leave due to misconduct (e.g. drug use or violent behaviour).

4.2.2 Legacies of military life

We know that there are many positive legacies of military service and for this reason; the vast majority of veterans have positive experiences upon leaving. Here however we consider some of the negative legacies which participants felt lead to difficulties upon their transition into civilian life.

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Needs of veterans, families and children – BEFORE custody

1) Lack of independent living skills

The impact of ‘institutionalisation’ in military service and the dependence this creates has been acknowledged in existing research²² as leading to a lack of knowledge or experience in independent living skills. For example, budgeting and managing funds, and maintaining payments for accommodation risks developing issues with debt and even homelessness (CSJ, 2014).

Our participants’ responses reinforced these findings, and described the military ‘family’ as providing hierarchy, routine and structure where basic needs such as rent, food and bills were taken care of.

“...you have structure. So when I came out I didn’t have a structure, you get taught what to do and everything’s done for you...”
(Veteran in Custody)

“I think it’s that structure that a lot of people leaving The Army struggle with. They fail because they rely on things being done for them and when they have to rely on doing things for themselves and they have to stick to a routine themselves that’s when it seems to fall apart a bit...”
(Veteran in Custody)

“...you go from having a structure, being told what to do...everything you know what you’re doing in your day-to-day...you go from that to, shit “what do I do?”, I’ve got nothing, no job, no support, no help...that’s when it goes wrong.”
(Veteran in Custody)

This was primarily linked to difficulties with finances, as when in the military; all their rent and bills (including child maintenance) were paid before receiving their salary. For those that entered the military straight from leaving their family home, this meant they “bypassed” this important part of civilian adult life.

“...he was so young when he joined The Army and those sort of late teen-through your twenties years, when everyone else is learning how to pay bills, learning how to move out of their mum and dad’s house and stand on your own two feet, and be independent and budget your money, they completely bypass all of that.”

(Partner)

“2015 when I got back from Iraq I hadn’t paid tax since 1999, I’ve never paid a bill in my whole life.”

(Veteran Representative)

“I’ve always been really bad with money. Always in debt, always living way beyond my means, and that’s a military trait that you struggle with because you just see money in the bank and I presume it’s mine, it’s nobody else’s. I’m not used to having to pay the rent or the bills and it was always done for me in the past”

(Veteran in Custody)

As shown in this last quote, the consequence of the military taking financial care of serving personnel is that the money that arrives in their accounts is largely disposable. Many reported spending huge amounts of money in a very short space of time:



“Millionaire[‘s] weekend...that was something that happened quite regularly. Very rarely would I manage to make a month’s wages last anything near a month, mine would be gone within 2 weeks, tops. I’d be lucky to have anything left by the end of the first week, really bad.”

(Veteran in Custody)

Whilst they are still in the military, they can spend this how they please but this is a different matter once they return to civilian life.

2) Alcohol use

Many of our participants reported using their salary to buy alcohol to participate in the drinking culture of military life²³. This could involve going several months without drinking, for example, when on operational tours, but would be followed by intense periods of drinking.

“[After active combat]...you’d have a week where they’d order you to go out and get drunk, that’s what they’d say, go and get pissed. And you’d all be fighting amongst yourselves, because that’s how you’d get your emotions out, and then you’d go home.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“...I used to drink, everyone used to drink, but it’s never been a problem, I can get smashed up with the lads for a couple of days and then not touch it again for months.”

(Veteran in Custody)

Although most participants recalled high levels of alcohol use and recognised this being a big part of military culture, very few veterans classed their alcohol use as problematic as they claimed they could stop at any time, go long periods without drinking and/or did not wake up and need a drink.

22. Thomas et al., (2018); CSJ, (2014).

23. The prevalence of alcohol use in the military has been widely acknowledged in existing research, such as Kings Centre for Military Health Research – <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/kcmhr>

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“...he thought for a long time that he wasn’t an alcoholic because he wouldn’t wake up in the morning and have a drink. There’s like more to it than that because it was secret drinking with him, and binge drinking more than anything, but he thought that because he could wake up and wait until after dinner to have a drink then he didn’t have a problem with it.”

(Partner)

“I would say I was never dependant on anything, I just thought, the lifestyle I was engaged in, I couldn’t be engaged in that sort of lifestyle if I wasn’t under the influence of something.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“I was never dependant on it, I just, when things got too much I binge drank to oblivion, got in a state and that would be it then for another 6 to 8 months.”

(Ex-offender Veteran in the Community)

Despite this, 11 out of 18 developed ongoing substance misuse issues at some point after leaving the military, suggesting this military legacy had a lasting impact on their lives in the civilian community. As this partner demonstrates, alcohol is an obvious ‘go to’ for veterans, especially when facing difficult ‘life issues’.

“And then he comes home and he has life issues he finds it difficult to deal with and he turns to drink and everyone seems shocked by that and it’s just like what do you expect?... the whole drinking culture in the army is just horrendous, it horrendous.”

(Partner)

3) Self-sufficiency

Although there may be a lack of independence within the military, this is fostered alongside being trained to be self-sufficient; to deal with any problems yourself, ‘crack on’ and not ask for help.

“[You] come out with a culture that we are told to keep your mouth shut and keep going, don’t talk about your feelings and keep going, don’t talk about how you are feeling to families or others because that’s not how it is done, you just keep it all in and you carry on.”

(Professional)

This high degree of self-sufficiency and privacy cascades down into the family and, as we shall see further on, has implications for both veterans and their families accessing support.

4.2.3 The reality of civilian life

The time between leaving the military and entering custody for the first time ranged between 0 – 17 years, with an average of 6.9 years. For many, their expectations of returning to civilian life were not met by the reality they found, in terms of family life, employment, level of pay and cost of living. Many were not prepared for this.

“And then going to civvy net where you get half the pay, your rent has double and you’re finding it difficult because the kids haven’t settled yet. The transition is difficult, it is not easy.”

(Professional)

Pressures to financially support their families and challenges in gaining employment compounded the ‘legacies’ of military life. Perceptions of what constituted a ‘respectful’ career choice appeared to be enmeshed in their self-identity, a sense that what they had seen and done in the military was not being acknowledged in the types of jobs they were being offered.

“I went nuts looking for a job. The pressures of people...I’ve gone from having responsibilities that are above and beyond this country’s ever seen to being told, you are nothing, you need to get a job in Costa”

(Veteran in Custody)

“There’s no job prospects, a lot of people don’t know how to employ ex-Servicemen... I’ve got no skills, I got trained to be an infantry soldier and guard the queen outside the palace...when I came out of The Army they offered to me to be a postman, I said I’m not being a postman, why would I want to be a postman when I’ve been on tour, stood outside the palace the majority of my life and you’re trying to make me be a postman.”

(Veteran in Custody)

A small number of veterans in our sample reported finding well-paid employment with relative ease and this was either due to absolute determination to secure work or performing a specialist role within the military.

“...if you’re in a branch of the Armed Forces where you can learn a trade, such as the Royal Engineers or REME or whatever, then OK you’ve got skills that are transferable to civvy street, but if you come from a combat element...”

(Professional)

They tended to find work similar to their military roles such as private security or engineering. For the majority of veterans we interviewed from an infantry role, finding employment was not easy and their military service was reported to sometimes act as a barrier.

“...a chap who had been in the military had applied for a hundred jobs quoting his military service and didn’t get an interview. So he took the military service out and got a job within a week.”

(Professional)

“And then really, the reality of leaving the Armed Forces is...you ain’t getting anything...unless you set your own company up and bring your own friends in...”

(Veteran in Custody)

For those that did find work, it was in manual industries such as: bricklaying, mechanics, bin man, factory labourer or management roles. This was often contractual/temporary work and for some this was an intentional choice, to keep moving, particularly if family breakdown had already occurred.

“I did a lot of jobs that paid weekly or paid monthly, that I could leave at a moment’s notice”

(Veteran in Custody)

“...worked my way up...earning shit loads of money again, but at that time I didn’t bother saving, I were just blowing everything, whatever I got, I blew...whatever, whoever, whenever, wherever, I were working all over the country...wherever I stayed I found another woman”

(Ex-offender Veteran in the Community)

The frustrations of unemployment and/or low income employment directed some participants towards (or back to) illegal activity as a means to provide for their family or as a response to building frustration with lack of employment.

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“...I’d work full time and it would go out on bills and I would have hardly anything left...it was basically surviving and not living. And then I found out my missus was pregnant with our baby and I thought, I’m not living like this no more and friends were doing this sort of stuff [drug crime] already and so I joined them.”

(Veteran in Custody)

Family difficulties and breakdown were common when returning to civilian life. This was often tied up in increased alcohol/drug use and violence expressed at home and in public, generally with underlying mental health needs.

4.2.4 Level of formal support

The level of support offered by the military around transition depended on various factors including: length of service, pre-existing resettlement plans, reason for discharge and the veterans own decisions around asking for/engagement with support. As a result, each veteran and their family had very different experiences, responses to, and expectations of support from their unit. It was unclear to the fathers interviewed and the researcher where the military’s responsibility for resettlement/transition begun and ended.

“I think he made some really silly choices at the time, I don’t feel like he was being offered enough support, I wouldn’t say they did nothing but they did what I would consider bare minimum, and in the end I think it was more about their own reputation and how he was sort of dragging them through the mud and they just wanted rid.”

(Partner)

“When you’re out you’re out...obviously the first couple of weeks to see if you’re alright settling it...they have a liaison officer...a bit of like contact...but...I’ll be honest...I just changed my number because I wanted The Army to just stop...leave me alone for a bit and I think that was the worst decision to be fair.”

(Veteran in Custody)

The answers given in interviews with veterans and families reinforced existing findings that certain groups of veterans are more vulnerable to negative outcomes. For example, ESLs appeared to be a more ‘at risk’ group due to their lesser transition support package²⁴. Out of the 18 veterans interviewed, 6 would be officially classed as ESLs – 4 left due to dishonourable discharge and 2 voluntarily. For the former, this discharge was immediate and it is this immediacy that is regarded as increasing the vulnerability of ESLs and their families when exiting the military.

“I find a lot of those who don’t know what to do or where to go etc etc., tend to be the wives of early service leavers, where you’ve got less than 4 years in the job, ID card is taken off them, they show them the gate, you know you haven’t been in that all long you should know what to do.”

(Professional)

Most veterans envisaged a long career in the military and the end came sooner than planned. As a result, they did not have plans in place. For those that were dishonourably discharged, however, the immediacy of their discharge meant that they went from being in the military one day, to being a civilian the next.

24. Johnson, T. & Murariu, G. (2016) Veterans in the UK: Issues facing the ex-service community [online] Available from https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/-/media/Files/.../Foresight_report_9_veterans.pdf (accessed 9/5/18).

The majority remembered being told about RBL and/or SSAFA when they left, but very rarely did they (or their families) access this support. Lack of engagement with this support was often put down to feelings of anger towards the military for being abandoned or ‘kicked out’, wanting a ‘fresh start’, not identifying as the ‘kind’ of veteran who could get support and/or an overhang of self-sufficiency from the military; ‘cracking on’ where asking for help was seen as a sign of weakness.

“...if someone was a bit of a whinge...we would always call him a SSAFA-case. And we would always associate needing help with I suppose weakness.”

(Veteran Representative)

To be able to access any support from military charities, the family largely relies on the veteran to identify, and link up family to support.

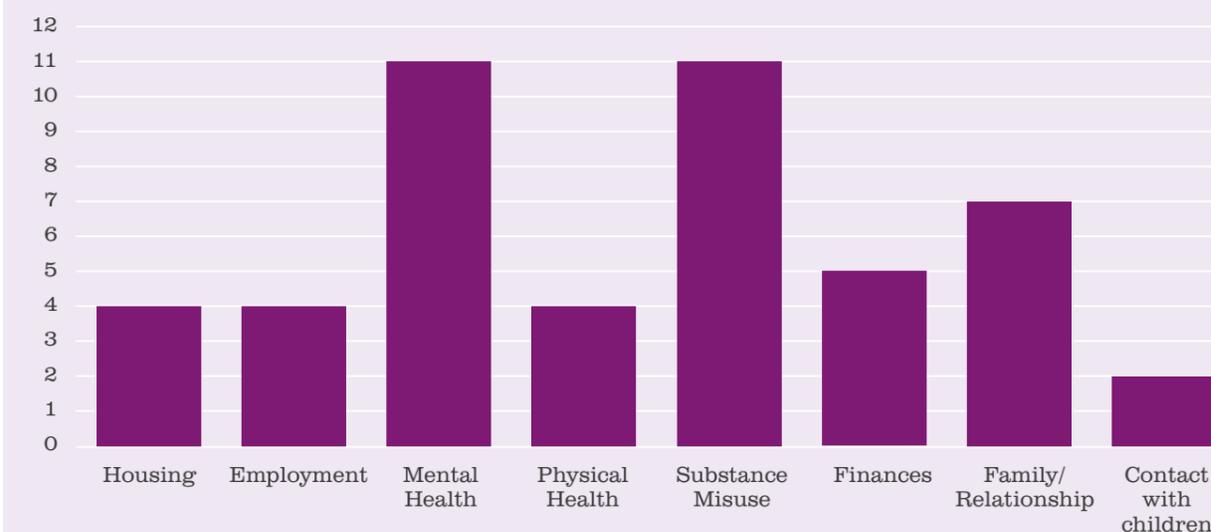
This potentially acts as a barrier to families accessing support if the family is separated and/or are not on good terms with the veteran. Eligibility for un-married partners was also raised as a potential barrier due to military culture where only married partners can access certain services and camp accommodation. As this veteran shared:

“...I think sometimes, even the long term girlfriends or the mother of the children, won’t always look at that as an option because they don’t think they would qualify. And that’s quite a normal thing, they don’t realise that they can get that help. That nips a lot of support in the bud right away because they’re not even thinking of it as an option.”

(Veteran in Custody)

4.3 The spiral into custody

Diagram 3: Support needs of veterans before custody



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The three most reported needs immediately prior to entering custody were: mental health, substance misuse and family/relationship issues. Sometimes, these issues were linked with pre-existing needs originating from early negative childhood experiences. As discussed in Section 4.1, this again highlights the MOD's responsibility in terms of recruitment, assessment of need and ongoing support. For some these issues were identified as a causative factor for leaving the military. When these issues arose later after leaving the military some still attributed these to their time in the military.

Following this, finances and employment were highlighted, supporting the points raised in the previous section. Housing was an issue for a smaller number of interviewees but, alongside substance misuse, presented a significant precursor to entering the criminal justice system.

4.3.1 Mental Health and Substance Misuse

As discussed in Section 4.2.2, the legacy of alcohol misuse was described as a key part of military culture and appeared to be a clear coping mechanism for veterans to deal with experiences in combat, transitioning and/or underlying mental health issues.

"It all stemmed from PTSD, mental health side of things, drinking and the violence side of things, DV and everything. So it seemed to be a little cycle."

(Professional)

"I was dead snappy and that with the lads, and some of my mates told me look you might be struggling because I was really angry, I was good at my job but my temper was really bad. And at night times I wasn't getting any sleep hence the reason I was probably snappy and it was getting that bad I was drinking a lot so put me to sleep you know, to try and get some sleep, then get up

to the next day and just do it all over again you know, and I was struggling really bad."

(Veteran in Custody)

"...I came out with my PTSD and that, I had really horrible nightmares and I relived a lot of things over and over again, and I started getting scared of going to sleep at night so I started taking whizz and amphetamines and that to just keep myself awake. So I'd be awake for weeks on end and then I'd just crash, and when you crash you just don't dream or nothing, you just asleep, gone, so I just carried on taking them."

(Veteran in Custody)

Feelings of anger and violence were occasionally linked to difficulties in 'switching off' military training, especially for those who worked in the infantry. Many highlighted how this was a consequence of the military not adequately addressing the psychological side of those transitioning from military to civilian/family life.

"I got trained to assault the enemy and then you can't switch it off immediately so you're trained to be this person and then once you get into society you're supposed to be able to switch that off, it's not possible, it's definitely not possible."

(Veteran in Custody)



"This guy said to me, he was suffering from PTSD, he said he was a sheep in a field full of sheep. And he was taken out of that field and turned into a wolf. Then when he was finished being wolf, they put him back into a field full of sheep....he was no longer a sheep ...he couldn't communicate, he couldn't relate, he couldn't get on with all of the other sheep because he was no longer a sheep..."

(Professional)

"I would say that the time that they actually take to train somebody to become a soldier or whatever rank they need to be in and whatever role they need to play, actually de-programming them is going to be harder and will take a lot of time...I don't think people realise how important it is to make sure we have got somebody ready. What you are doing is you are leaving somebody like a little hot bed and just plonking them somewhere and they are going to go off at any time and then they take no responsibility back for it. But family life is completely different."

(Professional)

4.3.2 Family breakdown

By the time the veterans interviewed received a custodial sentence; the majority had separated from one or two partners who they had children with. Hence, 32 out of 43 children involved in this research, notwithstanding the period of imprisonment, did not have or were not expecting their mother and father to be living together at home with them. This high level of family breakdown was reflected in our interviews with professionals and was often linked to veterans distancing themselves or not talking openly to their partners about their experience. It is arguable that, due to the veteran often being the main point of access to family support from military charities, this level of family breakdown would have significant impact on families' awareness of and access to support.

A police officer whose role focusses on working with veterans in the criminal justice system explained:

"The thing with children, I have noticed that there are a lot of veterans that have got families, most of them, their families have completely broken down, they have come out the forces and can't deal with married life or that relationship or that commitment and that type of environment. They tend to turn to drink. There are a lot of issues that they keep to themselves and they make it clear that their partner would not understand or get to know or anything. So they are already kind of shutting doors on people that perhaps would... their partners perhaps would get involved and would want to know because they can help and keep the family together..."

(Professional)

This professional continued by highlighting the difficulties families may experience in understanding the process of transitioning.

"...some families believe that once they are out the military, everything should be perfect. They should be happy cos they are home they are safe they are with their family, they are where they need to be. "You have done your bit now, you are here" They aren't educated, the family aren't educated about that transition."

(Professional)

Another professional managing a service working with veterans in the criminal justice system, and their families, gave a specific example around time anxiety and how a positive behaviour essential to the military, may not translate well into civilian life if it is not discussed.

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“On certain evenings of the week he would go to pick up his 2 daughters from the youth club, 8 o’clock pick up but unfortunately they don’t come out til 20:20. By the time he gets in the car he is actually fuming which is quite commonplace for those who have served in the military and have time anxiety. They have a bit of a ding dong with dad, gets home they have a ding dong with mum about dad. Mum has a ding dong with dad and dad has a ding dong with mum and it’s all going off. So we sat down with family...he was able to understand...his children are not soldiers and we said to the family that they understand that dad is not a bad man, but that is part of his makeup.”

(Professional)

One partner reported that, despite asking, she knew nothing about her partner’s experiences during the military and tentatively linked current behaviours to his time in the military.

“He’s never told me so I just don’t know, but it’s since he’s been in [the military] that he’s been anxious, paranoid.”

(Partner)

Another partner expressed challenges in balancing her and her children’s needs with the need to secure support for her partner as he was on the “cusp of being discharged” from the military.

“...at the time [I] found it really frustrating because...[his] behaviour at the time, I wanted him to get help for...I couldn’t have him living with us anymore because he was too chaotic and out of control but I wanted to help him, or I wanted somebody to help him. [I] knew that wasn’t who he was as a person and he obviously had some sort of underlying issues that were causing him to behave that way, and he was sort of on the

cusp of being discharged from The Army, and I was phoning them [the military] all the time and saying...I need help with him, someone needs to come and get him, someone needs to give him some support, whatever, lots of things.”

(Partner)

On the whole, she expressed that this support was not forthcoming from his regiment and equally, when he was discharged, it was a struggle to obtain support in the community as his behaviour continued to spiral out of control. A consequence of partners taking on the challenge of balancing needs was repeated spells of separation and reunion, a pattern which was evident in several of the families we spoke to.

Regular, prolonged and often sudden periods of fatherly absence from the family home were a factor for most families throughout military and civilian life whether this was enforced (military/civilian work, tours abroad, imprisonment, civil restrictions²⁵) or due to ongoing difficulties within the family home. Contrastingly, this absence was then partnered with intense periods of the father being at home 24/7. During these times at home, the likelihood of tensions and, in some cases domestic abuse increased, often with a backdrop of increased alcohol use and mental health deterioration. Taking steps to address any of these issues appeared to be magnified by the aforementioned legacy of military socialisation which prioritises privacy and the maintenance of a self-sufficient united family unit.

“...it’s that secrecy ‘shh, don’t tell anyone’ so the children are not disclosing [problems at home] because they’ve been sworn to secrecy. You keep it in your family, that’s how military veterans operate – you work as a unit, you don’t share your business.

25. For example, child contact restrictions or restraining orders.

So for children it’s carrying that secrecy around isn’t it, of what’s going on, because you’re told not to.”

(Professional)

Some fathers who reported substance misuse problems, explained they, sometimes intentionally, ended relationships and/or distanced themselves from their family and children as a way to protect them from any negative impacts.

“...one of the things that damaged me is that when I got home, I couldn’t pick my son up, because I felt guilty of all the times I’d seen kids crying, hungry, that I couldn’t help. I’d got that cold that when I got home I didn’t pick my kid up for two days and that broke my heart and then I realised what I’d become if you like, what had happened. But, then I got back into family life and I suppressed it, which is what happens.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“I became emotionally numb you know, and a lot of things might have, first of all, my ex-partner, I might have pushed her away.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“...we split up just after I came out...because I got on drugs and I didn’t want to be around my son when I was doing that sort of stuff...”

(Veteran in Custody)

“I’d just drink...and that’s when the issues started, and causing arguments with [wife] and that was it, I’d be gone. I’d put a few clothes in a bag, passport, she’d ring me up ‘Where are you?’ ‘Amsterdam’, ‘Are you coming home’, ‘Yeah in about 4 days, see you’ and I’d come back 4 days later.”

(Ex-offender Veteran in the Community)

4.3.3 Homelessness

5 of the 18 veterans experienced problems with housing in between leaving the military and entering custody. Periods of homelessness were reported to exacerbate the needs mentioned above and in some cases, directly linked to criminal justice.

“Yeah, but then, that’s when I went horribly wrong for a while, for about 4 or 5 years, just homelessness, drinking, fighting, I think I just got to that what’s the point... I didn’t know what to do, I was lost...I look back now, I was lost, I was just drinking and moving around, I couldn’t settle anywhere, I wasn’t happy anywhere I was.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“...because I had nowhere to go, I was on the streets straight away, sleeping in my car, sleeping in parks. I lost my license drink driving, had to sell my car, drank all the money from that, went to London, slept in Hyde Park for a few months, went to various hostels, it was just such a shock. Tried to take my own life, didn’t know what to do, I had no family support, no friends, no kind of brothers, sisters, nothing.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“...we ended up splitting up again when I was in there...I ended up going into a homeless place when got out, then I got into trouble again, got back with her, ended up in prison a year later.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“...the only way they are going to keep me out of jail is to keep me off the streets.”

(Veteran in Custody)

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4.4 Arrest and sentencing

With regard to the impact on the family at point of arrest and sentencing, there was a lot of variation, with many fathers having already lost or having limited contact with their children by this point. In instances where partners/children were involved, a small number were present on arrest. The potential impact on families and children varied based on several factors such as: the families' prior knowledge of criminality, police conduct, the father's conduct on arrest and/or type of offence.

For instance, the mother quoted below had no prior knowledge of her husband's criminal behaviour and so the shock was the hardest thing to deal with.

"So when he got arrested...it was more shock than anything because I didn't know what was going on and the police were coming in to raid our house. It was in the holidays and I was in bed, and the kids were in bed. It was a bang on the door and I ran downstairs. And they were so nice though I've got to say, they were lovely. They just said "we need to check the rooms"...you know like you see it on films where they trash the place, it was nothing like that."

(Partner)

However, this mother and her children experienced regular police presence at home and school due to escalating harassment from the father prior to his arrest.

"...it has an effect on the children, because when [father] spiralled out of control I had the police at my house every 5 minutes, that not a suitable lifestyle for my kids... it's stressful for them, what child wants to see a policeman in their house all the time? They stress about it."

(Partner)

For the two fathers below, their children were present on arrest and they felt their children experienced severe and long term impacts, including changing attitudes towards the police.

"...they seen me getting arrested, it was awful. My boy has got a thing about police now, you know, he don't like them, all because of that...it was one of the worse nights I had in prison in my life you know... my kids crying for me while they take me away."

(Veteran in Custody)

"Point of arrest traumatised my little girl, I was tasered by the police, so she witnessed all of that...She was kind of screaming her head off, she hates the police now, she hates them...Yeah, she's had sleepless nights, she plays with her toys, she mimics the police chasing and she's gone will her little dolls, "come on [father] I'll save you" and the police are coming nee naw nee naw nee naw."

(Veteran in Custody)

This mother described the days following her partner's arrest on camp, including the military police searching their family home.

"It was quite difficult at the time because, [son] was only two and I remember having to move him room to room as they searched each room. It makes me feel sick thinking back to then because it was just this awful feeling of...what's going on? Nobody is really telling me anything and again, being on camp, it was just, everybody was walking past, people looking in. And then from then on, you know, it was just people looking at me and my children. It was just something that you couldn't really avoid; you've just got to get on with it."

(Partner)



In terms of sentencing, the main difficulty identified was the long periods of uncertainty. During this time, other uncertainties arose such as the father's employment, often the families' sole source of income, and/or the care of their children. There was also a clear pressure to 'make happy memories' as a family before the father left.

"It was horrible, he had anxiety, he was scared, and obviously he knew he would go down...I was like, you won't go, it'll be fine. Come on, let's do this and do that, make memories, if you are going to go then let's do it now. But we didn't, it didn't happen."

(Partner)

"He was out on bail for about 6 months, so that was...he was like waiting, sat waiting for him to go to court...He were due for court in October, we had like our last family holiday, and that were a bit...towards end... I don't know, because I always, you've got to prepare yourself for the worst haven't you. So yeah that were awful..."

(Partner)

"...just a very difficult time and it was all up in the air. It was looking like he was going to get a suspended sentence so his lawyer said he very much doubted he would go to prison...so we had quite high hopes he would get a suspended sentence."

(Partner)

Veterans and families reported vague messages from authorities such as the police, the military and social services. There was a sense of families

having no control and being given very little or sometimes conflicting information. For example, fathers we interviewed and spoke to at veterans forums expressed frustration at being assessed as low enough risk to have contact with their children whilst on bail in the community and then having this contact withdrawn once they were sentenced and entered custody. Consequently, this was a very sudden change for the children, from seeing their father one day, to not seeing them at all for months/years.

4.5. Support Available – Early Intervention

The support available to veterans and their families throughout their, sometimes lengthy, journey into the criminal justice system varied greatly depending on the geography, experience and needs of each veteran/family.

Veterans and families generally appeared to only access support when in crisis, as a last resort.

4.5.1 Veterans

Any specific examples of early intervention services that did exist for veterans were rare and were the result of concerted efforts to build multi-agency pathways. For instance, one region employed a veterans' practitioner within the NHS Liaison & Diversion team. The success of this role relied on prompt identification procedures by the police and when they came into police custody. At the time of interview, this practitioner's contract was due to end within six months due to funding termination. She highlighted the time it takes to build rapport with veterans and the complexity of their cases.

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“They are also very guarded about what they talk about, you really have to build up a relationship to get information out of them. They are not going to talk like we are now, they take a lot of time to build up trust[...] They do present as quite high risk and they are never small offences, generally violent offences, alcohol related and DV are the top offences we see for veterans. Real safeguarding of the family and the children.”

(Professional)

Another service operating in the North of England, reported a similar level of complexity and how this often contrasts with the ‘single issue’ design of support services.

“They normally present with a range of issues, there are some services out there that deal with housing some with debt, maybe with mental health, some with substance misuse, but again these are all single strands.”

(Professional)

This professional emphasised the importance of conducting holistic needs assessments and the value of joint working, to promote collaboration rather than competition between services, acknowledging the value of what each agency has to bring to the table.

“We recognise our expertise, what we are good at, we do not try to step into an area we are not good at doing. We are effective but there are other services that are out there to do that work.”

(Professional)

4.5.2 Family Work

There was evidence of pockets of family work from these specialist early intervention services. Over time they reported it became increasingly evident that they could not support the veteran effectively, without supporting their families.

“I can think of numerous cases where the veteran has got support needs but a member of the family has more significant support needs and using that word again ‘holistic’ we may need to support that family member in order to benefit the veteran.”

(Professional)

We are aware of one service (case study 1) that was specifically developed to support families of veterans involved in the criminal justice system. Like veterans, a professional working for this service reported that the majority of families referred to their service were in crisis:

“...what we found when we started making contact and working with families was that by the time the families presented to us or were referred to us – i.e. via social services or the police, the families were in crisis. So...military families weren’t seeking support until they were in crisis.”

(Professional)

4.6. The “bath tub effect”

In terms of general stress levels as residents move into/out of custody, an ex-military VICSO gave a useful explanation of what he called the “bath tub effect.”

“...you’ve got high levels of stress and anxiety at the top end, when they come into the prison system, they actually realise it’s not so bad, the stress and anxiety levels bottom out and they are actually ok...but then they start to ramp up and increase again when they know that they are being released.”

(Professional)

CASE STUDY 1:

Family Veteran Support Service (FVSS), Barnardo’s Cymru

This project ran from 2016 – 2018 and was funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund (Armed Forces Covenant Fund) to specifically provide support to the families of veterans in the criminal justice system. Their team was made up of specialists in family work, psychiatry and education, with a mixture of military and non-military backgrounds.

We interviewed a previous employee of this service who highlighted the complexity of the families they supported and explained how the majority of the support offered, was to families of veterans ‘at risk’ of offending rather than those in custody, as by the time they were in custody, the family had already broken down.

Complex levels of need were reported in addition to offending, such as domestic abuse, substance misuse and above all, mental health issues.

“[T]he one thing that shocked us all was, when we made contact with the referral... was the poor mental health of the entire family... I always had to go in and address the mental health needs of the veteran, and the partner, before we could even look to do any work with the children, which

is what our role was...What we found was, neither party was in a place to affect change because their mental health was so bad.”

(Professional)

This complexity of need necessitated having several agencies involved in their care and support. What FVSS found was they were the only service offering ‘in-depth’ support to the family and often coordinated the services around the family. They found relationships took much longer to build with the veteran families than initially envisaged and that many veterans and their families were reluctant to access universal support, especially social services. Subsequently, FVSS found that agencies involved were not picking up on child protection issues and it was only through building trusting relationships with the families that FVSS were able to do this.

The worker we spoke to concluded:

“[T]here is a definite need for specialist family support workers within the military veteran world. And that’s about brokering trust, and continuity in knowledge.”



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This build up/down of anxiety was echoed in interviews with family members, with high levels of stress during arrest/sentencing, and then often a sense of relief and just 'getting on with things' once the father was sentenced and in custody.

4.6 Recommendations

1. Military independence, not dependence – the culture of the military is at odds with civilian culture and this has implications for veterans and their families when they return to civilian society. Military personnel are trained and socialised into a collective mind-set where HM Armed Forces take responsibility for their day-to-day needs. This culture opposes the individual mind-set of civilian society. Due to the young age many people enter the military, they are not able to 'switch' back into a mentality that they have never developed and this conflicts with the family, increasing the risk of family breakdown and potentially domestic abuse. We recommend that the abuse put basic measures in place to facilitate more independent living and budgeting skills such as: paying for monthly rent and bills. We recognise that the Government's Veterans Strategy seeks to address this need, and welcome the work that is already underway ensure it is met.

2. Staged Transition – transition or 'decompression' from and between military and civilian life, needs to encapsulate the psychological transition just as much as the logistical support required. This includes periodical transitions into/out of family life throughout service and the final transition out of the military. Improved communication between military and community services is required to facilitate this resettlement for both veterans and their families.

The MOD should look to fund a specific service for dishonourable discharge due to the additional vulnerabilities the immediacy of this decision can create for the veteran, their families and children. This could be delivered in collaboration with partner organisations.

3. Family preparation – education and training to be provided to families of military personnel to understand military life and vice versa for military personnel. Training should start whilst serving and cover the impact of military life and transition into civilian life, including possible needs and support services available. Relationship support should be funded by the military to couples (married or not) throughout their service and the years following their return to civilian life.

4. Alcohol – further research into the prevalence, context and support around alcohol misuse within the Forces and the impact this has on families and children. Re-framing and education around the definition of 'problematic alcohol use' in relation to the wider impact which alcohol use and ensuing behaviour has on military personnel/veterans and their family and children.

5. Training – public and third sector professionals that come into contact with veterans and/or their families (e.g. schools, GPs, third sector agencies) to receive training (such as 'Military Human' training²⁶ programme or alternatives), to ensure wide understanding of the specific culture of military life, transition and possible difficulties. This training must include experiences of families and children and details of support available. Due to the identified complexity of need, it is essential that safeguarding training is provided to ensure child protection issues are monitored and reported.

26. <https://www.yorks.ac.uk/courses/professional-and-short-courses/military-human/the-military-human-military-culture-transition/>

Section Five Needs of veterans, families and children – DURING custody



Section Five

Needs of veterans, families and children – DURING custody

5.1 Identification

5.1.1 Disclosure

Identification was widely recognised by professionals as one of the biggest challenges to working with veterans in custody, confirming what has already been acknowledged in previous research²⁷. Despite there being clear definitions of the term ‘veteran’, veterans and families’ perceptions of what defined a veteran was a potential barrier. For veterans, this was explained by various factors such as: the term being associated more with the American forces, a sense that the title can only be earned through experiencing combat or simply the length of time in between military service and custody. The term ‘veteran’ was much more than a word, but something which potentially opened them up to more questions which, without a high degree of trust, they were not readily open to answer.

“They say that if you served a day...but I think that people who served operational tours, they’re the real veterans really.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“To say I am a veteran is a big thing, that means I have to talk about what is going on for me and I don’t want to do that, you are a civilian and you don’t understand. That is what we are up against and that is difficult.”

(Professional)

The families we spoke to did not tend to view themselves as a ‘veteran family’, predominantly because they were not with the father when he was in service. However, in terms of support available to them, not identifying as a veteran family appeared to preclude them from accessing support they were eligible to receive. In the first instance, access to/knowledge of support relies on a chain of identification/information sharing which the family has little control over.

To access support, the family generally rely on the veteran self-identifying and then actively passing on this information to the family.

“...they are excluding their families from the help, [if] they’re not willing to disclose that they’ve served.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“...we rely almost 100% on the veteran telling us they need help, and very often because of pride or whatever they don’t want the help, and so to a certain extent the family are the hidden victims if you like, because if their partner doesn’t say ‘will somebody contact my wife because they need help’, then we can’t do anything, because we don’t know...”

(Professional)

Above all, feelings of humiliation, embarrassment and shame delayed or stopped veterans from identifying in custody and in some cases this was linked to their offence. Further reasons frequently cited were: fear of reprisals from extremists in prison, fear of further punishment from the military, lack of trust in support services, loss of military pensions or actively forgetting/rejecting military history due to negative experiences of discharge.

“Sometimes they are very proud. A lot of times families will stick to what their husbands say, you don’t need support, we’ll be alright.”

(Professional)

For many, it was not until they came to prison that they began to reconnect with their ex-military identity. For example, in the 17 years between leaving the military and entering custody, this veteran did not think about being ‘a veteran’ (and therefore, not accessing support for him/his family as a veteran) until he went into prison.

“I didn’t really default back into that mode until I went away – that’s when I really thought about going back into veteran mode, when I went to prison.”

(Veteran in Custody)

5.1.2 Fall from grace

There was a clear feeling from all participants that, for military veterans going into custody, there is a bigger ‘fall from grace’. This was based on the belief that working for the military is a highly regarded form of employment and so, it follows that the ‘fall’ into custody may be perceived as greater than the general offender population. In the same vein, it was felt that families, professionals and society have higher expectations of veterans in terms of how they should or should not behave. The resultant feelings of shame, guilt and embarrassment were cited by all as reasons why fathers might not identify as veterans on entering custody.

“I see coming here as failure, so I don’t come to prison as a veteran and say I’m a military veteran because I think it’s a double failure, I kind of hold myself to a higher, to my detriment, I hold myself to a higher standard and I didn’t say anything for a while.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“...there are issues around pride and a feeling of having fallen from grace because if you have spent a life in service or even a few years where the whole regime is around standards and leadership and values and then if you find yourself at rock bottom”

(Professional)

“...guilt and humiliation in terms of how they have fallen from grace in the eyes of their children and their families and their local community.”

(Professional)

“...they feel that they’ve let themselves down, they feel they’ve let colleagues down, their comrades down, the Cap badge down, the unit down...so there’s a real sense of embarrassment around declaring when they first arrive.”

(Professional)

Evidently this ‘fall from grace’ has the potential to influence the family and children, not only in terms of how they view their father, but also how they perceived to be viewed by the community as a whole family unit. The family potentially ‘falls’ this great height with the father and, as many veterans are first time offenders, this may come as a real shock to the family.

“Most veterans look back and they are quite proud of their service and that reflects in the family as well and the children. So you take that drop, that fall from grace, it is a bigger fall.”

(Professional)

“...military veterans in custody, first timers, they’re not career criminals, or don’t tend to be career criminals...it tends to be either violence related or sexual offending in terms of numbers...So there is a difference in terms of the impact on children and families... I would describe it as more stark, it’s more of a shock.”

(Professional)

27. The Futures Company (2013).

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Whether perceived or actual, this ‘fall from grace’ and the feelings that run alongside this, appear to influence whether veterans or families firstly identify as a veteran/veteran family and secondly, hold their hands up to ask for support.

5.1.3 The grey man

Avoiding identification and not asking for support, fell in line with a general coping strategy whilst in custody of ‘keeping your head down’ or as one professional put it, being the “grey man”.

“It’s escape and evasion, wanting to play the grey man...It’s a military term. Make yourself as small as possible to avoid being identified and standing out in a crowd.”

(Professional)

By raising their hand to ask for support, veterans felt they were making themselves (and their ‘fall from grace’) visible, increasing their vulnerability. This vulnerability was described in terms of physical safety (i.e. becoming a target for extremist groups) and as expressing a form of weakness, which went against the portrayal of a strong, independent and proud soldier. The expectation of military culture was described as dealing with things on your own and not making your or your families’ problems public.

“...his whole mentality that’s been drilled into him about not being able to admit when he needs help or that he’s got a problem. That has a big impact...”

(Partner)

“It’s such a macho environment, that when you come out of it, you don’t really switch off from it...You just don’t want to talk about it, you think I’ve got to do this on my own... I shouldn’t have to speak to someone else to deal with it, I should be able to deal with this on my own.”

(Professional)

This sense of ‘pride’ and fear of standing out was also identified by family members as a barrier to publicly admitting they need help.

“I am quite a proud person...I’m not one that likes to ask for help, especially with my family, that at 41 I still have to have help with rent. I personally just wouldn’t [opt for support outside of the family]”

(Partner)

“Pride maybe. I think it takes a lot to admit, “ok I need help with this” and I think for a lot of families, parents it can be quite...I hate to say embarrassing....but it can be quite, yeah embarrassing to ask for help and I don’t like that people think that.”

(Child)

5.1.4 Communication Strategies

Positive identification of veterans and communication of the support on offer worked best when using multiple strategies. For instance, large posters across the prison estate which are visible from the moment residents arrive:



“...when the guys come off the transport and they come through reception to be processed at [prison], there’s a great big sign there now which says “have you served your country?”... So straight away, as soon as they arrive, it’s in their face “you are safe here”

(Professional)

Including the question about military service at key points as residents arrive in custody was standard across all the estates we worked with. In line with the recommendations by Phillips (2014), it was reported that residents were given the opportunity to identify as veteran via the Basic Custody Screening Tool, as well as initial needs assessments (with key workers and/or health worker), equal opportunities forms and/or induction meetings. In this process, choice of language was highlighted as key to encouraging identification:

“...it’s quite difficult to get the guys to relate to the word veteran. So when you get talking about “are you a military veteran” or when we ask the question “are you a veteran or not?” it doesn’t really resonate in the same way...what I ask is “have you been in the military?” It’s a really small change in language...it can be really effective.”

(Professional)

Existing research supports the need for developing effective questions, and this should seek to identify family members as well as veterans. For example, Albertson (2017) suggests adopting the following question to capture all the five branches²⁸ of the Armed Forces community membership, which includes families:

28. As defined in Albertson et al., (2017) - (1) regular currently serving personnel, (2) volunteer and (3) regular reservists, (4) veterans, families of regulars, reservists or veterans and (5) the bereaved.

“Have you ever served in the Armed Forces as a regular, reservist or volunteer or are you or have you ever been a family member of someone who has?” (2017: 11)

However, professionals reported that any question about military service can often be met with suspicion from veterans, who worry that an affirmative answer will lead to further punishment (from the military). To mitigate this, a professional from a military charity suggested qualifying questions to emphasise that disclosure is about accessing services, not punishment.

“...qualify it and say ‘have you served in the Armed Forces, because if you have we can put you in touch with [military organisation] who may be able to provide some support for you or your family’”

(Professional)

The initial phase of entering custody was widely acknowledged as a time of high stress for most residents, especially first-timers (61% of the veteran sample). For many, it was not until they were more settled that they disclosed – when they felt safer and could see concrete offers of support (e.g. regular veteran forums). Therefore, professionals reported it is essential to employ ongoing opportunities for veterans to identify to give veterans the time they needed to disclose. The type and environment of the individual estate also had an impact, with rates of disclosure generally much higher in sex offender estates. Professionals linked this to the generally lower levels of violence in such prisons, enabling residents to feel safer to disclose.

Peer support was regarded as key to promoting disclosure e.g. prison officers occupying VISCO roles and residents taking on the role of Veteran Representatives. Veteran Representatives often made themselves visually identifiable by wearing veteran t-shirts and/or badges, organising regular veteran forums/events and going onto the wings to speak to individual veteran residents.

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“I walk around in a veterans t-shirt, you see it says ‘Veterans in Custody’ and I walk around with this veterans badge on and I make a point around the jail that I am a veterans rep”

(Veterans Representative)

Once a resident positively identified as a veteran, this was often followed with a more detailed assessment with the VICSO or a Veterans Representative to ascertain more information about their service, role and support needs. This was largely focussed on the veteran and any information about their family seemed to be gained more informally, as/when it was raised by the veteran. Some establishments had more formalised induction packs with information about support available for veterans and their families.

Despite the reported challenges around identification, every veteran interviewed regarded their disclosure as a positive decision which only benefitted their time in custody. For example, special services or ‘perks’ for veterans were mentioned such as extra gym passes, fast track to enhanced wings, direct telephone access to military charities and in one estate, a separate veteran wing. The majority of participants interviewed however, felt veterans should not be treated any differently and the main benefit was simply the experience of being around other veterans, re-building that sense of belonging and providing informal support to one another.

“I was fortunate that I met [veterans rep]... There is an actual veterans meeting, a group that meets once a month, and it is in itself a support. You’ve got people who are like-minded, experienced similar things to yourself to meet...you feel very comfortable that everybody in there you can trust...you already have a connection, so that in itself, just having the group is a benefit, regardless of whether it offers any further services.”

(Professional)

Considering the challenges reported in veterans identifying in custody, as the majority of support for veterans’ families relies on this identification, it follows that families are even less likely to be identified and consequently, access support.

5.2 “Getting on with it”

5.2.1 On the inside...

Following the ‘bath tub’ model, the build-up of anxiety and uncertainty prior to entering custody then begins to reduce as residents settle into the prison environment and ‘get on with’ their sentence.

In line with similar reports from other professionals interviewed, this realisation that prison is not ‘that bad’ is nuanced for veterans as the prison environment was described as being very similar to the military environment in providing structure, clear hierarchy, and male ‘comrades’ in the context of restricted liberty. The veteran re-transitions from an individual back into being part of a ‘unit’.

“I’ve spoken to quite a few prisoner veterans who prior to coming into custody, their anxiety was through the roof, they’re incredibly stressed they’re really angry about what’s about to happen and what’s going to happen...that fear of the unknown... once they’ve stepped foot into the criminal justice system and it really is no different than being part of a military unit, training together, eating together, sleeping together, deploying together, being away from your family...there’s this kind of invisible big exhalation”

(Professional)

“We’ve got a little room, just like the barracks, it’s full of men, just like the barracks, there’s a big wall with barbed wire on it, just like the camp, I can relate to this quite quickly and easily. That’s something

that as a default mechanism a lot of veterans will jump to right away. Instantly you’re at home, straight away you’re back at home.”

(Veteran in Custody)

The potential ‘ease’ at which veterans adapted to the custodial environment carried positive and negative behaviours. For instance, professionals reported veterans being respectful towards authority, following rules and getting involved in activities, especially if this was linked to the military. However, the custodial environment, akin to a military operation, was often referred to as ‘hostile’ and resulted in a switch back to ‘survival mode’. This required constant hypervigilance to any threats to safety, being in ‘fight’ or ‘keep your head down and carry on’ mode and suppressing any issues/emotions.

“I feel like with veterans...it’s either fight or flight...we don’t have no flight, it’s just a thing of you stand your ground and you sort it out.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“Every vision that went through my head when I was in Syria was to get back to my children, and that doesn’t stop by being in here, I still have that same feeling, it’s still strong, this journey isn’t over, this fight isn’t over yet not by far.”

(Veteran in Custody)

5.2.2 ...on the outside

After a lot of uncertainty in the build up to the sentencing, families expressed having to push their emotions to one side and ‘get on with it’:

“Hearing that he’d gone away? I don’t remember much. I think I was in year 2 at the time. I remember coming home and mum was in bits. I think I found it hard to react... And from there, it’s all kind of a blur because we kinda just got on with it.”

(Child)

“I am kind of on auto-pilot, make sure they are ok, make sure they have got food...I think it was just to make it, even though it is just a part of life, but this is our life now and just carry on, just keep going...”

(Partner)

This mother expressed a sense of relief, once contact with her husband was in place, as she and her children were able to focus on their lives.

“It felt for me...kind of a bit of relief because, right that’s the sentence, he’s going to serve that now. Again, once he got his phone credit sorted and we had contact I was like yes, we can...because I was worried about him you know, could he do this? How’s he mentally going to cope with this...he has just been kicked out and gone to prison... how is it going to be for him? But once he was there and he was like, getting on with it, it was like, right it is our turn to get on with it now...and just the everyday, getting into a routine again, with the support of my friends and family.”

(Partner)

Despite a similar ‘bath tub’ experience for both the veteran and the families, the lives of families and children whilst the father is in custody, was regarded on several occasions by professionals and veterans as much harder than being in custody.

“I had it easy, I had the easy life in prison, yeah I were locked up but I had it easy compared to what she had to do....She had the hard job, not me...”

(Ex-offender Veteran in the Community)

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“I’ve got to be here but my family have got the worst end...they still have the added stress of me being here, then not seeing me, the kids not seeing me, then they got life in general...bills, work and everything to take into account. So they have it worse than me.”

(Veteran in Custody)

At the same time, the support, motivation and/or the ‘glue’ the family provided was regarded as essential to ensuring the veterans positive rehabilitation. This reinforces Lord Farmer’s (2017) recommendations, that in order to reduce levels of recidivism, families of all parents in custody, must have access to help and support when they need it.

“...the family have got that glue, more than us [professionals]. You’re [the veteran] sitting tidy, having a cup of tea, watching EastEnders, your partner has to travel by train, by bus, by taxi to get here. Is she experiencing problems? Do you know the support that’s on offer for her? Because she is the one doing all the work at the moment.”

(Professional)

“They are a big part of keeping things together, a big part of the jigsaw, the glue. If we can keep them supported then they are better at supporting their husband, Dad.”

(Professional)

As a starting point, the support needed was help in setting up methods of contact with the father and basic information sharing to mitigate the feelings of ‘not knowing’.

“It took a while because I hadn’t heard anything, because I remember feeling really worried because gosh, I thought, I haven’t even had a phone call...I was worried about him, I was worried about...the children

were asking, there was a lot going on and it was just a bit of a shock for all of us. Just knowing how he was, was he ok? What it must have been like for him?”

(Partner)

“It’s also the not knowing...people don’t hear good stories about jail do they? They only hear the bad stuff, so if someone says my dad’s gone to jail – oh my god is he being beaten up? Is he alright?”

(Professional)

“Yeah she’s [child] watched the telly so she thought something bad was going to happen to him.”

(Partner)

This ex-military VICSO used his experience of being away from his family on tours as a resource to empathise and understand the experiences of families with fathers in custody.

“...when I was away, when I was overseas on my tours, my family used to worry sick about me because they didn’t know what I was doing, where I was. And I think the same applies to the guys in the prison system. If there is a massive lack of information around the environment – are they ok? What kind of breakfast do they get every day? How many hot meals do they get a day? Have they got access to the gym? All of those kinds of details that we take for granted... that is a real source of comfort for families.”

(Professional)

Some professionals suggested that, in the short-term, these families might be more resilient than non-veteran families when the father goes into custody, as they are used to the father being away.

“I think military children, speaking generally, are a bit more resilient to that temporary loss, but I think there’s a lot more, in general speaking, they’re not being told the truth. So...it might not impact initially but it will further down the line...”

(Professional)

For veteran families, this secrecy about the father’s custodial sentence is in addition to a pre-existing culture which, as discussed in Section 4, prioritises secrecy within the family unit.

This resilience was supported by one family we interviewed who had lived on military barracks and the father was discharged and sentenced to eight months in civilian prison.

“I think with being a military family...it sounds wrong this...with deployments or detachments when they have to go away for months at a time, it kind of becomes the norm where we prepare ourselves and the children that Daddy is going to go away. We see him pack all his things and sometimes we don’t hear from him for weeks. But, the children were very young, in my instance. So I think it prepared me myself and how to prepare the children. I think for a normal civilian family, I think it must be a massive thing for the children and families.”

(Partner)

However, there was recognition that there was potentially a flip side to this familiarity of paternal absence and experiencing it again, could reinforce children’s worries for their parent’s safety.

“...a child who’s parent is leaving them, been deployed, going to some warzone or whatever, and then you get the constant worry of is my mum safe or is my dad safe? Is he safe? Is he being hurt? But for the services children, when they’ve seen both sides, the deployment side of it and then coming into here [prison] as well, it’s very much like a double barrelled shot gun, they’re getting it all over again.”

(Professional)

The impact and upset caused by this repeated absence was expressed by one mother whose partner missed out on the early years of both his children’s lives, the first due to military deployments and the second, due to his current sentence:

“She [child 2] was 3 weeks old when he went in. So when he was in The Army with [child 1] he didn’t see any of this, because he was in The Army and now he’s away he can’t even see her [child 2] growing up.”

(Partner)

5.3 Who needs to know?

5.3.1 Children

The majority of veterans interviewed or their partners had told their children that they were in prison. Out of 18 veterans, 4 reported actively deciding not to tell their children. Out of these 4, 2 had entered custody within a year or less of leaving the military and the other 2 undertook employment prior to custody which required them to be away from home for long periods of time. From their responses, it seems that the more recent experience of their father being away ‘at work’, provided a useful framework to explain their absence. Other factors that influenced what children did/did not know included: length of sentence, family separation, levels of contact, previous experience of the father being away for work, previous sentences or the age of the child.

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“The first time I was in [prison] on remand for three months, they thought I was in Iraq but we tried to play it smugly with my ex-partner. And then three months later when I was still in prison that is when we broke the news to them...they know I was on one month leave when I got arrested, when I was taken to custody they thought I was going abroad again.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“She knows this place as daddy if you know what I mean. I came to jail when she was what 3 months old...yeah 3 months old so she just knows this place as me. And then obviously my other kids always ask when I’m coming home from work.”

(Veteran in Custody)

For those that did decide to tell their children, depending on the child’s age, strategies were employed to ‘soften the blow’. For example, not being specific about how long their father will be away for or not giving details of the offence. 3 veterans reported withholding information about the charges and later finding out that their child(ren) had searched online and found out on their own.

A veteran here explains why he decided to tell his 6-year-old daughter:

“I told her, I felt that you know a child’s mind works very differently to ours, it’s very black and white you know and whether she knows it or not, me leaving, she’ll think it’s her fault, so I didn’t want that to affect her later on in life, she may become needy so... we told her, that I can’t come home, I’ve been naughty and I have to stay here, that’s what happens when the police get you. I think it’s better like that because now she knows that it’s not her fault. Because it’s the deceit as well because once they’ve figured out that you’ve lied, you’re teaching them how to lie then, you’re teaching them how to be deceitful, you’re teaching them that they can’t be trusted, they think they’ve done something wrong, so all that kind of stuff.”

(Veteran in Custody)

The impact of the ‘deceit’ involved in not telling children was expressed by other veterans with very conflicting feelings.



“...they were seeing daddy every day and to stop hearing from him...they knew, even if I was in Iraq, Afghanistan, wherever I was on tour, I always still managed to speak to them on the phone you know. And for them to just not hear of me, they knew something was either wrong, or, well to this day they still don’t know the truth. They think I’m, she [mother] told them that daddy’s working away...Do I really want to let the kids know the truth or do I want to keep on lying to them, because it’s something that makes me worry you know. The kids...have always known daddy is a soldier, for one of them to go to school and say my daddy’s in prison it not a very proud thing for them to...there’s different ways of looking at it you know.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“...we just told them I was working away. [But] with this job I do now, at some point I will have to be working away and I don’t want them thinking...they’ll probably think I’m back in prison”

(Ex-offender Veteran in the Community)

Equally, a professional working with veterans in custody shared a response he gave to a veteran who was unhappy about another professional who had inadvertently told his 7-year-old daughter that he was in prison.

“Your daughter is seven years of age, she has walked up here, been patted down, been sniffed by the dog, sees all these bars... whose lying to who? What do you think she’s doing to protect your feelings? You’ve put that on her at seven years of age, what are you doing?” Families lie, they lie to protect these children and they don’t mean it, there’s not bad intentions, they want to protect each other but you’re not, you’re living a lie and that lie continues”

(Professional)

The value of honesty was equally expressed by this child.

“I think it really pays to be honest with that kind of thing. Because if the kid knows early, they get used to it. But if they go through it believing one thing and then one day this whole illusion comes shattering down around you...that can be quite hurtful... to learn that not only the people you trust most are lying to you but that what you...the picture you had of that parent, is not what you thought it was. I am really appreciative that they were honest with me.”

(Child)

5.3.2 The families ‘fall from grace’

When discussing how families decided who to tell and who not to tell, for those interviewed there was evidently stigma attached to the father being in custody. This was sometimes based on responses from friends, family and/or the local community but equally on the families’ perception of what people would think or do with the information if they decided to share.

The impact of the press was mentioned by a small number of veterans.

“It was on the local news once I’d been sent down, so there was no hiding it from anyone. It wasn’t a case of daddy’s just gone, it’s like everyone knows where dad has gone, because it was on the local news. So they had to contend with that.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“...they have to live in the community and it was all over [newspaper] you know so, I can’t imagine the shame or embarrassment. He [son] said he doesn’t feel embarrassed but you have to a certain degree, so there’s that effect that it has on people”

(Veteran in Custody)

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The sharing of this information in the local community and uncertainty that went with it, increased anxiety amongst families and children.

“It were harder at first because I think I’d kinda walk down the street and I’d feel like ‘oh there’s that lady there whose husband’s in prison’ and I’m like...you know, because everyone...we’re from this village so everybody knows us.”

(Partner)

“I thought everybody knew. When I was at school in the playground, I thought everyone was looking at me, so that wasn’t very nice. But probably nobody knew. Who knew, who knew?”

(Partner)

“It is the worst when people change when they hear about it.”

(Child)

“One of my military friends said the way you enter school would be different. Like with your head down and...cos again it was a small camp and whispers and rumours... it was nobody else’s business and I kept myself to myself a lot.”

(Partner)

Partners and children reported being very selective about who they chose to tell this ‘secret’ of their partner or father being in custody. One mother expressed that initially she did not want to tell her friends and family, but based on advice and support from her child’s social worker, she did tell them and, in the end, this was a positive decision.

“...I felt a bit of support and a bit of relief really that they knew and they were there to help even though they hadn’t been in that situation before. It was just knowing there was someone there to talk to, knowing I could cry....let it all out”

(Partner)

Only a small number of families actively chose to tell the school or nursery about their situation. Most did not see it as ‘their business’ or assumed this communication would happen automatically between the school, the prison and other services.

“...I didn’t feel like I could approach the school and tell them things, like it’s just not something that I want to do, I don’t want to discuss what’s going on...if you’ve been approached by children’s services and the police, that there’s all this stuff going on, is it their responsibility to say?”

(Partner)

“I told the teacher once, when she was in year one, and I don’t think the teacher told anyone else and obviously she’s in year two now so I don’t think...and I just think why do I need to tell them?...It’s not nice to talk about, I don’t like talking about it anyway”

(Partner)

“I do think it was me going to them, because I wanted just to talk to the head teacher. I think [daughter] needed that support, she’d been through a lot with moving. I just wanted her to be ok. So I did, same with [son], his nursery. I went to them.”

(Partner)

The weight of the stigma of having a parent in prison and there being no clear benefit/support on offer, seems to put the balance in favour of not telling schools. There appears to be confusion or lack of transparency around what happens with this information, where responsibility lies and what services do/do not share.

Those that did tell the school generally did so in response to the identified changes or concerns about the child’s behaviour. There were no negative consequences reported once the school had been told, in fact, only positives in terms of accessing additional support such as counselling or play therapy. One child benefitted from weekly sessions with her teacher where they followed activities sent by a specialist family worker for children with parents in prison.

“...she has a teacher, once a week...who she has time with a memory box and they talk about Dad and things that they want to put in [...] I remember the teacher saying to me, if [worker] hadn’t sent anything, they would be struggling about how to support [daughter]. They didn’t know where to turn to or where to look for help.”

(Partner)

This specific example, detailed more in ‘Case Study 4’, was very rare and demonstrates a tangible benefit to disclosing the family situation to the school.

One veteran wished there was more communication between prisons and schools, as he reported the impact his custodial sentence had on his 10-year-old son’s behaviour:

“It hit him hard when I told him I had to go away...his behaviour...it’s gone downhill... I would love my boys teachers to come in because...he struggles with his school... and obviously I just get it relayed, of what my ex tells my current fiancée”

(Veteran in Custody)

5.4 Family contact

Diagram 4: Veterans in contact with children



Out of 43 children, 31 had contact with their father at some point whilst they were in custody. This covers various types of contact (social visits, telephone, emails and letters) and contact with step-children and children from previous relationships. 25 had face-to-face contact and the remaining 6 only had contact with their father via telephone and letters/emails. 11 out of the 31 children were only able to have contact with their fathers because of paternal grandparents, current partners/ex-partners or aunts facilitating the visit and in some cases, liaising between their mother and father. 12 children had no contact with their fathers whilst they were in custody. The reasons given for this were short sentence length, relationship breakdown with the mother, difficulties in arranging visits (communication, finances) or uncertainty regarding permitted contact (this was often unclear to the father).

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From the perspective of veterans involved in this study, 14 had contact at some point with at least some of their children. For 2 of these veterans, this contact was later withdrawn, apparently due to interventions from social services. They both expressed uncertainty about this due to receiving unclear information, either from the mother and/or prison professionals, all they knew is that contact stopped. For these 2 and the 4 that had no contact with any of their children throughout their sentence, they all hoped to re-establish contact with their children on release in some way but it was unclear if this would be possible.

5.4.1 Letters and emails

Contact via letters or emails seemed to be the least preferred method of communication, primarily due to the delays in arrival (especially if telephone contact was also taking place). Cards were regularly sent/received for important celebrations e.g. Father's Day or birthdays.

5.4.2 Telephone

Telephone contact with the most regular form of contact for participants, with the majority speaking anything from twice a day to once a week on the phone. Phone calls were generally made in the evening and were an opportunity for fathers to say good night to their children before they went to bed.

In private prisons, easier access to a telephone was highlighted as a positive mechanism to maintain family communication.

“The good thing about the private sector in prisons is you do have telephones in your cell, so phone calls every night. That made a massive difference. That telephone in your cell, is what I think, probably saves a lot of peoples marriages and relationships. For me, that phone has been crucial.”

(Veteran in Custody)

This is in comparison to public prisons where one veteran stated:

“there are two phones for 40 people.”

(Veteran in Custody).

Issues with finances and the expense of making phone calls to mobiles was also highlighted as an issue which meant some veterans were actively trying to reduce the number of calls they made on the prison public phone.

One child interviewed only had contact with her father via letters and telephone whilst he was serving an 8 month sentence.

“No I didn't get to see him...I could only hear him on the phone...I couldn't even see him completely.”

(Child)

When asked if it was nice to speak to her father on the phone, she answered:

“Yes....until daddy stopped and he spoke to mummy...I hate it when it goes like that, because I get so frustrated and I never get to see him that often.”

(Child)

From interviews with her father and mother, we know that this family sought advice from professionals and other families about what to expect from a prison visit. Based on this information, concerns about the presence of other offenders in the visits hall, the distance and the father's relatively short sentence, they made a decision for the children not to have face-to-face contact.

5.4.3 Face-to-face visits

Social visits are available at all prison estates, with their frequency each week varying depending on the specific regime of individual prisons. They are generally 2 hours in length and take place in a communal visits hall where residents must stay seated in their allocated seat. In the majority of cases, family members take responsibility for booking via the prison booking system but in some prison estates, the resident books in their visits.

Family visits, depending on the estate, take place less frequently (once a month or quarterly) and are often organised by the charity operating the visitors centre. They are typically 3-4 hours long and involve additional activities (such as hot food, interactive games or visitors) and the resident is generally allowed to move and interact with their family.

In terms of face-to-face visits reported, these were via social visits and to a lesser degree, family visits. The frequency of social visits ranged from once every week, two weeks, month or as/when it was affordable. 8 children included in this study received weekly face-to-face contact and in all these cases, the families lived in close proximity to the prison. For the other families, distance, and subsequent cost this implied, was a key factor in how frequently they were able to visit. The availability of the partner/ex-partner to facilitate the visit was also key and much more challenging for mothers who had to balance this with full time or part time work.

“...that's probably one of the biggest reasons that I don't go and visit him as often as I'd like to, I mean it costs me £40 a time just in fuel to get up there and the last two times I've gone there and back in a day because I can't afford to stay there.”

(Partner)

There were examples of financial support for travel/accommodation being sought via the Assisted Prison Visits Unit (APVU)²⁹ and/or military charities. 2 out of the 5 partners interviewed had no knowledge of the APVU and reported they would have used it had they known. Social visits were often made possible by the support of other family members and/or local services.

The process of going into the prison on a social visit was described by one child quite negatively, especially local prisons or 'ones at the start'³⁰.

“...the ones at the start were much more harrowing to go through than the new ones. The first ones it was like going through all the different bits, the dogs would come in and then you would go through all the gates, you felt more like a prisoner. And then the new ones are still the same thing but seemed more relaxed, I know it wasn't but it seemed relaxed. But it always felt wrong, it was weird. I don't like doing it.”

(Child)

A mother described how she felt the first time she and her two children visited her husband in prison (a remand prison):

“Oh my god, so scared. It is quite a blur now. I do remember the shaking, and then the dogs being next to you and putting your bags in lockers. It was quite fast moving. However, everything was just...weird...very strange...it's like I was in my own...I was in a different world.”

(Partner)

29. <https://www.gov.uk/help-with-prison-visits#other-ways-to-apply>

30. Local prisons generally have higher numbers of residents on remand, and therefore higher turnover of residents and less capacity for rehabilitative interventions.

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The environment of certain prisons was often a deciding factor in whether social visits took place. Depending on the length of sentence, some fathers chose to wait until they were released, or in lower security prisons, to have face-to-face contact. Others felt concerns about the types of offenders who would be present in the visiting hall prevented them from having contact with their children:

“I know the sole reasons my ex-wife won’t bring my two kids here is that she doesn’t want her kids sitting in a room full of, effectively, child sexual abusers. Um...that’s why she won’t bring them in, but if there was a private room she could bring them into, she would. But that’s not reasonable to organise, it’s very difficult.”

(Veteran in Custody)

Family visits, where families are invited for extended visits with organised activities, shared meals and physical contact with the father were described positively.

“Family visits...there weren’t very many, maybe two or three, even if it was that many. It was nice, there was just lots of games, food and you just went and it was nice because...at the visits you have to sit at the table, at a certain seat and [name] couldn’t get out of the seat. Whereas at the family visits were a lot more open, walking around, talking to other families.”

(Partner)

“[Family visits] are all right because you can get up and play so it’s good. You can have more hands on...and kind of be normal parent for like 3 hours so it’s alright yeah... warm food, and just like...it’s like naffy, just chocolate, drinks, just naffy food.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“There was a families day, and I was like ‘that’s amazing, a families day’. The families day was great and we did that and you didn’t have to wear those silly bibs and you could be with your children, play games with them for the whole day and it was great, interact with them and fantastic.”

(Veteran in Custody)

One veteran expressed that family days specifically for veteran families would be beneficial. In one estate (case study 2), veteran family days already take place and are held quarterly (8 in total per year – 4 for main prisoners, 4 for vulnerable prisoners), providing opportunities for partners and children, as well as veterans:

“Yeah...I think the veterans one is better than the normal one, there’s more support for like...my partner if she weren’t working there’s opportunities for her to go into work and stuff like that...there is a lot of charities that come in.”

(Veteran in Custody)

Aside from the geographical and financial challenges in making social visits, one family reported reducing the number of visits whilst the father was in custody for 7.5 years as a way to manage their emotions and time apart.

“...a visit tends to get in the way of the flow of time, if you imagine that your time is a steady flow, a flat rate, you see a visit as this big mountain, and all you focus on is this thing approaching you. So emotionally you’re not engaged but it upsets the balance of everything else you’re trying to do, your routine. So I see this mountain approaching, and the anxiety and everything else that goes with it. I know how I’m going to be on the visit, so I’m just not looking forward to it the way that I should be. Then you have this visit, and then you’ve got the downer.”

(Veteran in Custody)

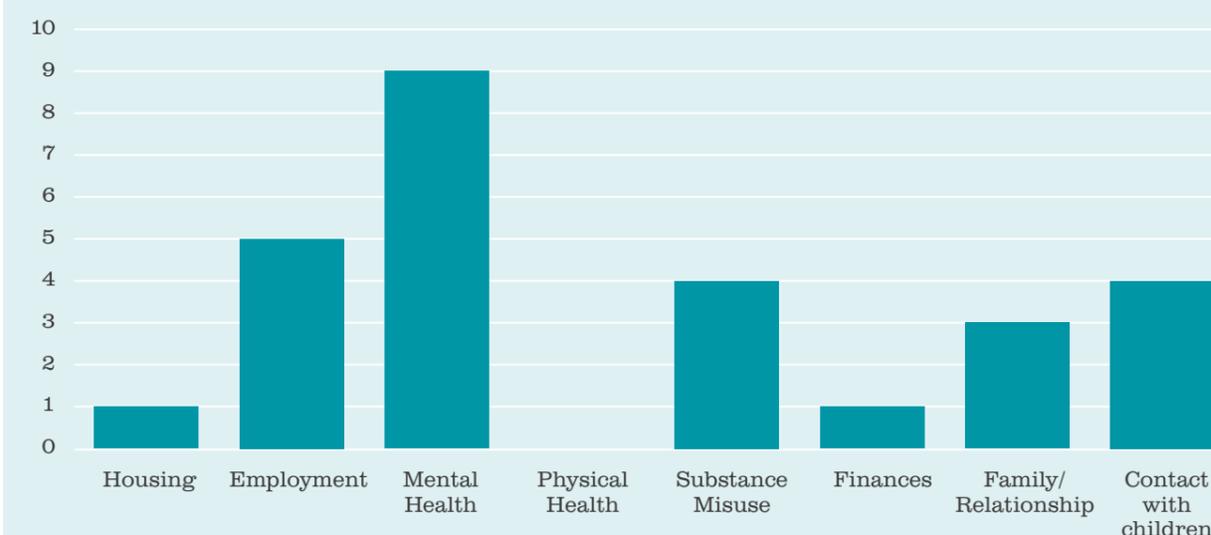
“Going in was great, big hugs, kids running up, there was always a shop, kids playing. It was always that last half an hour when the bell rings and then it was like ‘ohh’, that’s when it would sink in...that we got to leave.”

(Partner)

A combination of length of sentence, distance, finances and the disruption to the routine or ‘survival mode’ influenced the frequency of social visits.

5.5. Veteran Support Needs

Diagram 5: Support needs of veterans during custody



During custody, mental health was the most frequently identified support need. This was followed by employment, substance misuse and, as discussed in the previous section, contact with children.

5.5.1 Mental Health

Mental health was the most frequently identified need during custody with 9 out of 18 veterans involved in this study identifying as having mental health needs during their custodial sentence. However, not all 9 veterans who did identify mental health as an issue were

experiencing active symptoms and generally felt ‘well’ and/or were managing ongoing issues or diagnosis with medical treatment in order to ‘survive’. Out of the remaining 9 who did not identify as having mental health issues during custody, 5 did not report mental health issues at any time in their lives. For the remaining 4, their previous mental health issues were either directly related to the sentencing process or they reported feeling ‘well’ whilst in custody, often linked to other needs being met such as housing and abstinence from substances.

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Thus, those veterans that accessed mental health support did not directly correlate to those who identified mental health as an issue during custody.

“In here, the mental health...I have stabilised myself, not so much stabilised but managing, I don't think this environment is the right place to treat PTSD...I still treat it as a hostile environment, which it is, and that's how I'm dealing with everything.”

(Veteran in Custody)

In some cases, professionals also reported that the parallels between operational tours and custody could have negative impacts in terms of triggering trauma either from military experiences or even childhood. The appropriateness of the custodial environment for mental health treatment in general was raised by professionals, in the context of increasingly limited funding in the public sector.

“...it's all about resources. We do not have sufficiently trained and sufficient in number, members of staff who would be able to pick up the pieces following some clinical intervention.”

(Professional)

Those that did express a desire to engage with mental health support reported varied experiences with a variety of statutory and public services. For instance, long wait periods, sudden changes in staff, eligibility criteria or prison moves delaying and/or stopping support. A small number of veterans positively reported attending groups related to mental health, such as anger management or understanding trauma but expressed a desire for 1-1 psychological support. One veteran serving a 9 year sentence was working towards a transfer to a therapeutic prison.

“I need psychotherapy because my life was in order from 16 in the Army. My life has been in a set way and I can't, it seems I can't break out the circle that The Army has put me in....It's like I find it hard to live, live in society, like with people, even family. It's not the same connection that I had from when I was in The Army and I reckon it's faulted me somehow and I think I need some psychological just to tell me why I'm thinking the way I am”

(Veteran in Custody)

“...it's like a long process, you have to see healthcare, you have to see mental health... and every time I was going I was moving establishments and then...you have to re-do the process...I don't really want to go into some group talk...To me I think I'm alright....everyone thinks...I wouldn't mind seeing some professional 1-1, to see if it would help me.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“I was told that counselling is only for people who are in prison for the rest of their life.”

(Veteran in Custody)

Evidently, the combination of the environment, perceptions of wellness, support on offer and length/type of sentence influenced veterans' engagement with mental health support whilst in custody.

5.5.2 Substance Misuse

There was a stark drop in the number of veterans identifying as having substance (primarily alcohol) misuse issues 'before custody' compared to 'during custody' – from 11 to 4 out of 18 veterans. The general response from veterans when asked about this was that, because they were unable to access alcohol or drugs, it was not an issue. This supports the notion from the



previous section that despite acknowledging drinking large quantities of alcohol prior to custody and reporting negative behaviour in relation to this, most veterans felt that as soon as they stopped, it was no longer an issue.

Only 2 veterans reported accessing support for substance misuse during custody, including group and 1-1 work. Both of these veterans reported drug as well as alcohol problems. One spoke very positively about the support they received from the NHS drug and alcohol team at the prison:

“...they are brilliant, honestly they are two amazing people and without them I don't think I'd of got where I am now....I can't imagine my life back on them. For me to come from where I did to saying that it's massive”

(Veteran in Custody)

5.5.3 Other identified needs

Contact with children (discussed in section 5.4) and employment were the next most frequently identified needs. Employment was generally responded to positively, employment was and was generally responded to positively, by attending as many courses on offer at the prison. Many veterans reported accessing funding for more long-term study from the military via support from military charity prison in-reach. Training/education spanned from basic maths/literacy, to vocational skills (painting, decorating, building, railway building) and more academic courses (psychology, business studies, peer advisor certifications).

Outside of the recorded issues, veterans reported accessing support from military charities to deal with issues specifically linked to their military service. For example, military pensions, badges or ID cards.

5.6. Support Needs – Families and Children

5.6.1 Mental Health

For the 10 family members interviewed, only 1, a teenage child, reported a mental health diagnosis. They described their anxiety as being directly linked to their father being in prison and their fears around whom they could/couldn't trust with this information at school.

“I think that most of my anxiety came from... for some reason, this is the one thing I would take back...I told the wrong people about my Dad and then the anxiety came from the thought “Oh god what if they tell everyone, I'll come to school tomorrow and everyone will be laughing at me.””

(Child)

For the other 4 children interviewed, they were between the ages of 5 and 6 years old and consequently, they were only able to describe their emotions using basic, black and white language e.g. happy or sad. All 4 children reported feeling a mixture of happy and sad when their fathers left home.

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However, these more complex emotions sometimes came out in other ways. For example, a mother described finding her 6-year-old child crying in their room and eventually, the child explained that they were worried their mother would leave like their father had.

“Lonely. Yeah. My daughter’s finding it hard, my eldest, she cries all the time”

(Partner)

And this child speaks about the anxieties our character, Dudley the Dog might have when his Dad is away.

“Worried...Where’s daddy? Erm..... what can he do? To get him back. And does he... I miss him so can I have him. Can I go and find him.”

(Child)

Without answers, these worries and questions could lead to the child feeling guilt – that they are not able to ‘get him back’ as well as sadness in missing their father.

A Family Project Worker working with children of offenders (military, veteran and general population) explained the unique experiences of children with parents in prison, something they refer to as ‘disenfranchised grief’:

“...it’s very isolated, there’s a real stigma to being in prison, whether that’s detention centre or prison. They’re a unique set of children basically, because they have all the issues of someone bereaved but that parent is still around. So we’ve been doing a lot of work on disenfranchised grief, because they are grieving for someone who is still alive, and that’s really tough, the isolation.”

(Professional)

This isolation was evident in the interviews with children. For example, when asked through the lens of a fictional character whose father

has gone to prison, this child expressed the following.

“He is thinking....that he is alone, almost. Like no one cares and there is nothing he can do about it. Powerless almost.... Everything[’s] going on, nothing has changed almost, the world around him, no one else seems to bother. [And in his close family?...]things are just quiet almost.”

(Child)

This feeling of isolation, quiet and powerlessness was a common feeling expressed by the children we spoke to.

For 4 out of 5 partners interviewed, they reported that the interview with our research officer was the first time they had been asked about how the experience was for them. They did not report any mental health issues but did report investing a lot of emotional energy to ‘get on with things’, trying to keep things as ‘normal’ as possible for their children.

“...it was always about [father] or the kids. No one...I think [father] would ask how I was obviously but it was never a big deal, no one really asked. I think people wouldn’t want to ask because they didn’t want to upset me, you know, I can cry, I cry at the drop of a hat so they probably...don’t want to rehash it out for me.”

(Partner)

“...I’m lonely sometimes, do I need to talk to someone?”

(Partner)

“...there were times when I would just lose it for a bit...I think if I’d have not got my kids it could have been worse, but they gave me something to get up for in the mornings”

(Partner)

One partner struggled recalling many details, something she linked to the emotional impact of it all:

“...it has been almost a bit traumatic, some things thinking back...I find it hazy because just so much has happened.”

(Partner)

However, even before the father enters custody, a professional working with veteran families at risk of entering the criminal justice system reported high levels of mental health issues which had a huge impact on the whole family:

“Depression - massive depression; anxiety - a lot of anxiety, which really affected the capacity of the parent because they just weren’t present. Their depression, anxiety and trauma was so much that it deflected and took them away from being able to... they were just about holding it together, and not actually doing any work being there and present for their children. And then the knock on effect of that was the poor mental health of the children.”

It would follow, therefore, that for many families their mental health may already be an issue (whether it is identified or not) before the father is in custody. Unless a service is specifically targeting the family, it is very likely that their mental health needs will go unnoticed, especially for the mothers whose main focus is their children.

5.6.2 Finances

All partners interviewed reported finances being the biggest issue for them once their husband/partner went into custody.

“...the main struggle was finances. Finances were the worst.”

(Partner)

“Finances I’ve struggled with, probably the biggest struggle.”

(Partner)

Once the father was in custody, many of the partners we spoke to had to navigate a drop in income by applying for benefits and/or finding, sometimes multiple, employment alongside caring for their children.

“So when he actually went away, I was on benefits for a while, for about the first year but it was too much of a struggle.... so I got two jobs and then benefits as well which helped.”

(Partner)

Her partner in custody described the ‘sacrifices’ she made to keep the family financially afloat and provide for their children.

“I think what she’s managed to do is she’s just sacrificed so much for herself in order for the kids to have these little things which the school just expects us to be able to afford. She’ll say ‘well I won’t buy these trousers I’ve been waiting to get or this top I’ve been waiting to get.’”

(Veteran in Custody)

One mother described receiving support from a military charity as her partner was simultaneously discharged from the military and went into civilian custody. She had to move herself and her children out of military married quarters, find a house and apply for benefits before securing employment.

“...a lady from [organisation] in Yorkshire, she came here to visit a couple of times and helped me apply for benefits because I didn’t have help to do that. And how to fill everything in...”

(Partner)

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Two partners interviewed referred to regularly receiving support from their extended family, including help with rent, employment and housing. They both expressed that without this support, they would not have been able to survive.

5.7 Support Available – Custodial Sentence

5.7.1 Veterans in Custody Support Officers / Veteran Representatives

Across the 13 prison estates we engaged with, there was wide support for the Veterans in Custody initiative and each prison had an identified VICSO. However, this initiative lacked consistency and could quickly alter with changes in staff/residents/workload. The voluntary nature of the VICSO role in many estates impacted on this consistency due to constantly changing shift patterns and the need to prioritise operational duties³¹.

Peer support has been widely raised in existing services as essential to any support on offer for veterans³². In this study, almost every veteran interviewed referred to the level of trust between veterans, feeling an instant bond with other veterans which enabled them to open up and offer support.

“If someone is an ex-soldier, you’d be more willing to help him because he is a part of you, a part of the same family.”

(Professional)

Of the 7 VICSOs interviewed, 5 of them were ex-military and all 7 expressed a huge degree of passion for the work they were doing. For 2 of these VICSOs, their VICSO hours were included as part of their profiled hours, and 1 of these was a full time 9am-5pm post. The other 5 reported taking on this additional work voluntarily,

often using their rest days to run veterans forums or complete work they were unable to do in their working hours. The VICSO work appears to rely on this empathy and passion of an individual or a small number of individuals.

There was wide support from professionals that VICSOs should be provided with profiled hours, arguing what is needed is:

“...a formal network of support in prison that works – VICSO scheme good but officers should be paid to undertake this role as an additional responsibility, NOT rely on their good will.”

(Professional)

For those that did have profiled hours for their veteran work, they were able to offer more consistent and further reaching support. For example, providing ongoing support when the veteran was released or moved to another prison, or offering support to families and children. However, a small number of VICSOs without profiled hours did provide this support to families voluntarily, extending far beyond the remit of their role.

“If there is some outreach as soon as that person goes into the criminal justice system...to the family, that says “hi, this is me”...I used to do this for people who had wives or girlfriends at home that had small children or a family to support. I would contact them and say “look, just to let you know, this is me, this is who I am, if you need anything please feel free to give me a ring, there might be some service charities out there that can help.” But a lot of that reliance is then on, the veteran in custody to stick their hand up and say “I’ve got a family who need help.”

(Professional)

Just like more ‘official’ forms of family support, this often relies on the veteran informing their family of what support is available and verifying their service before work with the family can begin. This work outside of a professional’s allocated remit demonstrates the passion of individual workers. However, the lack of monitoring of this additional work may potentially place professionals and/or service users at risk.

We interviewed 9 veterans who were either Veterans Representative at the time or had been at some point during their sentence, 2 of these were not fathers (not officially included in the veterans sample for this research). Having a Veterans Representative was a mutually beneficial way of reducing the workload of the VICSO and providing veterans with an opportunity to have a role in a community within the prison that they care about and belong to. Veteran Representatives reported various activities as part of the role including:

- Meeting and assessing veterans new in custody
- Acting as a visible point of support for veterans (e.g. wearing military t-shirt)
- Checking in regularly with veterans to encourage identification, to listen and liaise with support when necessary
- Organising regular veteran forums (ranging from weekly, monthly to quarterly)
- Organising activities and fundraising for military celebration days
- Representing veterans at equality and diversity board meetings

The varying levels of accessibility and types of support on offer to veterans in custody, both prison-based and from the charitable sector, meant that it was often unclear what was available. This clarity was highlighted as a need by a Veteran Representative we spoke to:

“It’s just knowing what we can and can’t have...I’m still not sure what I am entitled to know and I’ve had questions [from other veterans]...”

(Professional)

The majority of Veteran Representatives felt their experience as a veteran was sufficient to prepare them for the role and their awareness of family support available varied greatly. There was limited standard training undertaken or on offer for either VICSO or Veterans Representative roles in relation to supporting families and children of offenders and/or the specific needs of veterans in custody and their families. This depended on the training/education available, the support from the VICSO/management, the level of family work already taking place in the prison and the personal interest of the VICSO and/or Veteran Representative.



31. Albertson et al., (2019; 2017).

32. For example, Remember Veterans (2018).

Section Five

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CASE STUDY 2:

HMP & YOI Parc, Endeavour Unit

HMP Parc, managed by G4S, was the first prison in the UK to develop the concept of a **separate wing**, specifically for veterans and first-time offenders. The unit was established in 2015, based on a growing awareness of high numbers of veterans in the prison estate. The initiative aimed to offer veterans a “familiar but not comfortable” environment where veterans could benefit from being around fellow veterans, but the presence of non-veteran first time offenders would prevent it from becoming so familiar that they were unable to adjust to civilian life back in the community.

“Giving them the opportunity to come to a small dedicated unit with a particular culture is going to make it more likely that first time in custody veterans are going to engage with opportunities...they are going to see and read and digest information that is on the walls...create an environment that is familiar but not comfortable. [You] don’t want it to be overly militaristic, in what it looks like, what is talked about because ultimately the purpose of that unit is to help them become successful citizens on release...to avoid recidivism.”

(Professional)

As part of the offer to veterans across the whole of HMP Parc (not just the unit), there is a full time **Veteran Support Mentor** who offers support to veterans whilst in custody and during their transition into the community (and between prisons). This support is extended out to family members if the veteran identifies this as a need.

They run eight **Veteran Family Days** a year (quarterly for both the main and vulnerable prison population). These are similar to general Family Days operated at most prison estates, where the family can visit their father for an extended period of time, enjoy organised activities, eat together, and physically have contact with one another. In terms of identification, holding a specific family day for veterans provides an environment of safety and familiarity and makes their families visible to the prison/visitor centre staff and military charities.

“We invite the charities and they bring their stalls and their support, their pop-up banners, information, guidance, advice...certainly got that military feel to it but again, the emphasis on there is about family engagement. Around the edge of that is that kind of, fairly gentle, awareness raising that the support is available is for you, it’s available for your children, it’s available for your families and yourself in here....here it is, this is what it looks like, these are the people, these are the services on offer...this is not available to other prisoners.”

(Professional)

5.7.2 Military Charities

For many veterans, coming into custody was an opportunity to reconnect with their military experience and learn about the charitable support on offer for veterans.

“I didn’t know anything about [military charity] and things until I come in here. I didn’t actually know that there was so much help out there for veterans to be honest with you.”

(Veteran in Custody)

As already established by existing research³³, it was widely reported by professionals and veterans involved with this research that there is a plethora of military and veteran support services in the community. Within this magnitude of charitable support, confusion was often expressed in finding in-depth or concrete support due to changing and variable approaches, criteria and project funding.

In terms of support for veterans in the criminal justice system, recent research has found that only 31 out of 1,888, or 1.6%, of charities that work with veterans, work with those in the CJS³⁴. This is significantly less than the support on offer for physical health, mental health and education/employment and supports the feelings of rejection expressed by participants and the real-life implications of this ‘reluctance’ of agencies to engage with these veterans and their families.

“There seemed to be a lot of reluctance in a lot of the charitable sector to extend that support to veterans in custody...by default the families of veterans would be...precluded from that support because their veteran of the household or the family was actually in a prison environment”

(Professional)

“I found out that although they say they do certain things there was massive barriers put up saying no they couldn’t help with that, they couldn’t help with that, they don’t do this no more, they haven’t got this funding, they haven’t got that. So it was massive rejection really.”

(Professional)

However, there was an acknowledgement that this support has increased in the last few years and positive feedback was given about military charities providing prison in-reach. Depending on the prison/area, the charities’ volunteer caseworkers regularly attend veteran forums and offered support across a wide range of issues. Predominantly, the help given by these charities was financial, accessing funding on behalf of the veteran (e.g. ABF The Soldiers’ Charity³⁵) to contribute to courses, clothing, rent or white/brown goods to set up their home on release.

Any further forms of support were specific to the veteran and varied widely from prison to prison. For example, a peer mentoring scheme supporting veterans for 12 months before/after their release, veteran housing support, free calls to veteran specific mental health support in prison cells and PTSD treatment.

33. Fossey et al., (2017); HLP, (2011).

34. Cole et al., (2019) <https://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/DSC-Armed-Forces-Charities-in-the-Criminal-Justice-System.pdf>

35. <https://soldierscharity.org/>

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As with the VICSO support, a great deal of value was placed on the individuals offering support to veterans in custody (either voluntarily or paid) being ex-military themselves.

Particular challenges were reported in relation to those serving sentences for sexual offences, where many services are not available to this population. This generally related to specific issues around risk but some professionals, felt that charities were worried about publicly supporting sexual offenders and how this may 'taint' their work. Due to the high number of veterans convicted of sexual offences, this presents a significant challenge for veterans in custody, their families and the professionals supporting them.

"...it almost seems as if you've got an exclusive group of veterans being supported. For me, who now works in a majority sex offender prison, I feel really uncomfortable with that."

(Professional)

The charitable support was extended to families when requested by the veteran, primarily supporting with things like travel for visits or furniture for their home. Asking about family was not a standard assessment question for most military charities and as a result, data around family members is not routinely recorded.

For families, knowing about and accessing this support was dependent on the veteran 1) knowing their family might need support and 2) telling the military charity about this. The risk of families falling through the gap when support is dependent on this line of communication was acknowledged by a professional working with families in a different context, the Military Corrective Training Centre. They shared that they have altered their service to ensure they capture the partner's needs as:

"...we often find they think their partners don't need support when actually they might, they're making that decision without really discussing it"

(Professional)

This is inevitably going to be further impacted if the family is separated and/or contact is irregular. Even for the families that are together, the majority of partners involved in this research were not in a relationship with the veteran whilst they were in the military and consequently their children were either not born or very young. Therefore, it is likely to be a strange experience for families to suddenly engage with discussions, information or services linked to their partner's/father's military past if they have little connection with this.

Other forms of military charity support mentioned which extended to the whole family were in relation to employment/training, and this was only reported in prisons where there was substantial provision for veterans in custody (i.e. separate unit).

However, one veteran expressed the kind of support he felt was lacking, which was reflected in further feedback from professionals – they highlighted the limits of single issue/signposting services and the importance (and lack of) holistic and pro-active support for veterans and their families.

"...there's not really deep down support, individual support or someone keeping an eye on how I am and how I'm doing."

(Veteran in Custody)

"I firmly believe that signposting doesn't work. Anyone can sit there and say you need to go to your doctor or the job centre but they may need that hand-holding, they may need someone there to go with them..."

(Professional)

CASE STUDY 3:

SSAFA – Veterans in the Criminal Justice System

SSAFA (Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association) provide a specific prison in-reach service for veterans in custody. This support is provided by volunteer caseworkers throughout the UK.

SSAFA volunteers and staff have a regular presence at veteran forums and offer 1-1 support for veterans in custody in relation to prison visits, ID, pensions, prison moves or accommodation on release. This support can continue once they are released into the community. The veterans' family members including, dependents up to the age of 18 years old, can also be supported. This can help in areas such as clothing (e.g. school uniforms) and day-to-day living costs (e.g. goods vouchers, furniture), signposting to specialist support (e.g. debt advice), accommodation advice or supporting family links.

Families are able to self-refer and receive support from SSAFA's community volunteer caseworkers. SSAFA will contact the veteran to confirm their service history before commencing work with the family. Once this is done, this work can continue independent of the veteran.

In our sample, the majority of support received from SSAFA was accessing funds and financial support. For example, for one family SSAFA funded their initial travel for prison visits and for another, SSAFA accessed funds to get the family new furniture. SSAFA also offers practical support, such as supporting families to access benefits and signposts onto more specialised services where appropriate.



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5.7.3 Family Work

Every prison involved in this research contracted out their visitor centre to an external charitable provider. This was generally run by a Family Engagement Worker (FEW) and a team of volunteers, providing: a waiting area for families on visit days, support for families, play facilities in the social visits hall, organisation of family visits, 1-1 support for fathers in custody and/or families when requested and running a variety of family/parenting courses inside the prison estate.

There was a general awareness of the family visits, play facilities and courses by the veterans and their families. The visitor centre was described mainly in terms of a 'waiting area' with some acknowledgment of more passive offers of support e.g. via posters.

"I've read the posters and stuff but no one's ever come to talk to me and I've never thought [of] anything of them...you know when you see posters in places and you're like, oh yeah."

(Partner)

Only a small number of veterans and families interviewed were aware that 1-1 support from the FEW was available for fathers and/or families. Again, the level of awareness varied depending on the size and level of support on offer at each prison. For example, veterans serving sentences in a prison with a separate family wing expressed much greater awareness of family support on offer, even though they were not on the family wing themselves.

The most frequently mentioned form of support was the family visits and some specific courses such as: parenting programmes, story exchange programmes and baby bathing.

There seemed to be very limited collaboration between the VICSO, FEW and/or charity professionals, with no clear understanding of who should take the lead with family support. As such, a VICSO reported:

"...in my experience I think there is a lot of opportunities being missed in the outreach work with families...not just veterans but all, drop-in centres, getting other organisations to come in and support families, to do drop in sessions as part of the visitors centre, when that's open to welcome families. Specifically for veterans they don't do a great deal of work, there is not much collaboration between [family work charities] and [military charities] which is a shame."

(Professional)

5.7.4 What is needed for families and children?

The general feeling from professionals, veterans and family members was that the main things needed for families and children were:

1) Increased awareness of family support on offer (for professionals, veterans in custody and their families).

"I think the families need to be made more aware of it...like the family days...once they are aware of it to reach out."

(Veteran in Custody)

"Probably one of the reasons why they wouldn't access it is because we [veterans] don't know about it, do you know what I mean."

(Veteran in Custody)



2) Proactive engagement as families reported being unlikely to access support unless a professional made the first step.

"I don't know who deals with contact with the family, but that [contact] needs to be made, rather than that person [family member] thinking that they need help but don't know where to go for it. The family needs contact...rather than relying on the fact that they think they need that help and go searching on the internet."

(Professional)

Another professional, who previously worked for a service within a charity specifically supporting the families of veterans in the criminal justice system, expressed her concerns when referring to the parallel journey the child undertakes when a parent enters the criminal justice system:

"...there isn't one agency that takes sole responsibility for that child's offending journey"

(Professional)

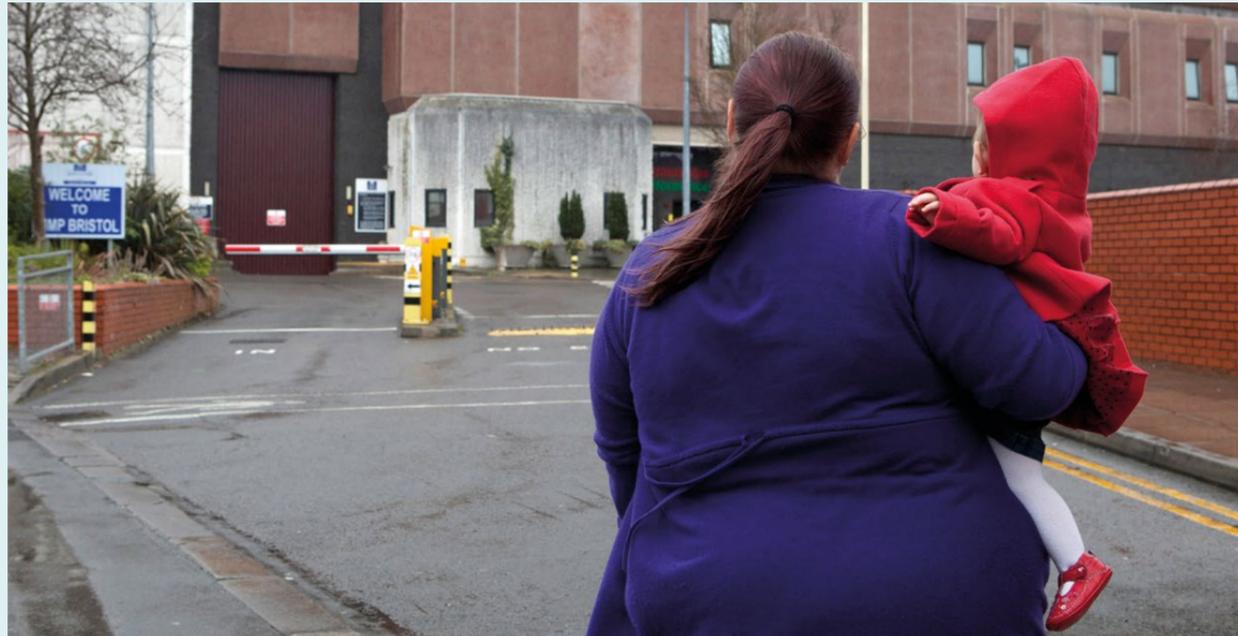
Not having a single professional coordinating this journey increases the risk of siloed working and the needs of families and children going unnoticed. There was one example where this support existed – a family worker based in the Military Corrective Training Centre (case study 4) who provides national support for families of detainees as well as families of non-military offenders. This partner reported huge benefits from this support:

"Yes...just amazing. I don't know how we'd be now without it. I think [child] is a lot better she has dealt with things much easier just being able to talk and to draw and to read what [worker] has sent her and to have a teacher involved with that and support her."

(Partner)

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CASE STUDY 4:

Barnardo's Invisible Lives, MCTC

This project operates in Essex, providing information, advice and support to children, young people and families affected by parental offending behaviours or the criminal justice system. This involves 1-1 support and group sessions to address the needs and worries of children with a loved one in any stage of the criminal justice system. They also liaise and train relevant agencies, such as schools, to enable them to better support children in their care.

This specialised work is rare, essential and under threat of funding cuts. As an employee reported:

“We are the only service in Essex that provides this specialised support for children, young people and families and

therefore securing long-term funding is essential to keep this necessary service running”.

As an additional part of this work, Barnardo's Invisible Lives are funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund to provide a family project worker one day a week to the Military Corrective Training Centre. This family worker sees every new detainee who is identified as having children within their family and offers support to their family wherever they are based within the UK or abroad. If the parent consents, the worker then contacts the parent in the community and offers remote support to the children, parent and any services involved in their care e.g. schools/local authority.

Most partners referred to the value of having at least one other person to talk to who was going through the same thing. However, they highlighted the need for more organised group support, something which could take place at visitor centres and not necessarily need to be specific to veteran families.

“It was nice to have someone know exactly what it is like. Whereas you can talk to your friends but it's quite a big thing to go a prison to visit somebody, so it was quite nice to have someone to talk to.”

(Partner)

“That's what I wish that I had. Like another mum to talk to with that experience...groups and things for families and children to go to, prisoner families...”

(Partner)

“...it would be the bit that I would enjoy, if you could enjoy a visit, you know like, we said we probably all know each other better than...we sat and spent more time together than what we did on the visit...I think I would have done something where families could meet, because we've all been in different situations, people have experienced different things.”

(Partner)

For children, the importance of having their mother and/or a figure of authority to support them was highlighted.

“The other parent. Friends and family. I think sometimes authority, whether teachers or whoever, an authority figure to them just to know that they know and they are there. It is the worst when you feel it is obvious what is going on and feels like they look straight through you...”

(Child)

“[Who do you think they might need around them to make them feel better?] Mummy... Like my mummy right here... [You're mummy's been around you lots?] Yep, loads and loads.”

(Child)

But beyond 'being there', this first child expressed frustrations with support being passive and wanting adults and peers to actively ask questions, to show interest. This reduced feelings of being alone and the silence and stigma that tends to surround imprisonment.

“More questions about it. It feels so good to just talk about it and someone, not only actively listening but questioning about it. Just simple things like, how does it feel? ...it feels really good to talk about it when someone is actually listening and also curious about it and asking back....it can't go wrong. You can ask them and if they get offended, you apologise and say it won't happen again and now I know what to do. If you do ask, and they appreciate it because it shows that someone cares. Show some enthusiasm...”

(Child)

Fathers often reported that, although they could not be there physically for their children, they made peace with this to a certain degree by ensuring they were provided for materially. However, a professional working for a children's charity working directly with families affected by parental imprisonment reported that they often debunk this common misconception in their training. Rather than money, or the latest clothes or computer games, what children of all ages have directly told them is:

“I want you to spend time with me, take me to the park, watch a film with me.” [C]hildren's basic needs are not the latest trainers and designer clothes – they just want time”.

(Professional)

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Overall, for both veterans and families it seems there needs to be more proactive engagement from services to families, increased awareness of existing support and a move to more holistic models of support for both veterans and families where family 'time' is prioritised.

5.8 Recommendations

6. Language

Changing the language used around 'veterans' to 'ex-Armed Services Personnel' in acknowledgement that many British veterans do not identify as 'veterans' and this may preclude them and their family from receiving support. The use of the word 'support' should also be reviewed by services as it seems to create a barrier due to the ideas of weakness many veterans and family members attach to the word.

7. VICSO Services with profiled hours

Each prison to provide a Veteran in Custody Officer with profiled hours dedicated to this role. This could be across several members of staff to ensure consistent support via veteran forums, veteran representatives and external charities. This commitment to profiled hours should include joint and recorded work with family engagement workers (FEWs), outreach to families and standard training, covering family work topics such as safeguarding, domestic abuse and parenting. There is also positive work to be done joining up veteran services within regions and VICSO support across the UK, offering spaces to network, provide mutual support and share best practice.

8. "Familiar but not comfortable environments"

Providing spaces for veterans which offer the opportunity to reconnect with their military past but also prepare them for their return to the community. Separate veteran wings are a positive initiative at larger estates or a regional wing for several smaller estates. This includes continuing to build on the peer support already available for veterans in custody but also create opportunities for family peer support, for instance, making use of visitor centres to provide support groups. Those in formal peer support roles should have access to regular and robust training relevant to their role, including safeguarding/family work.

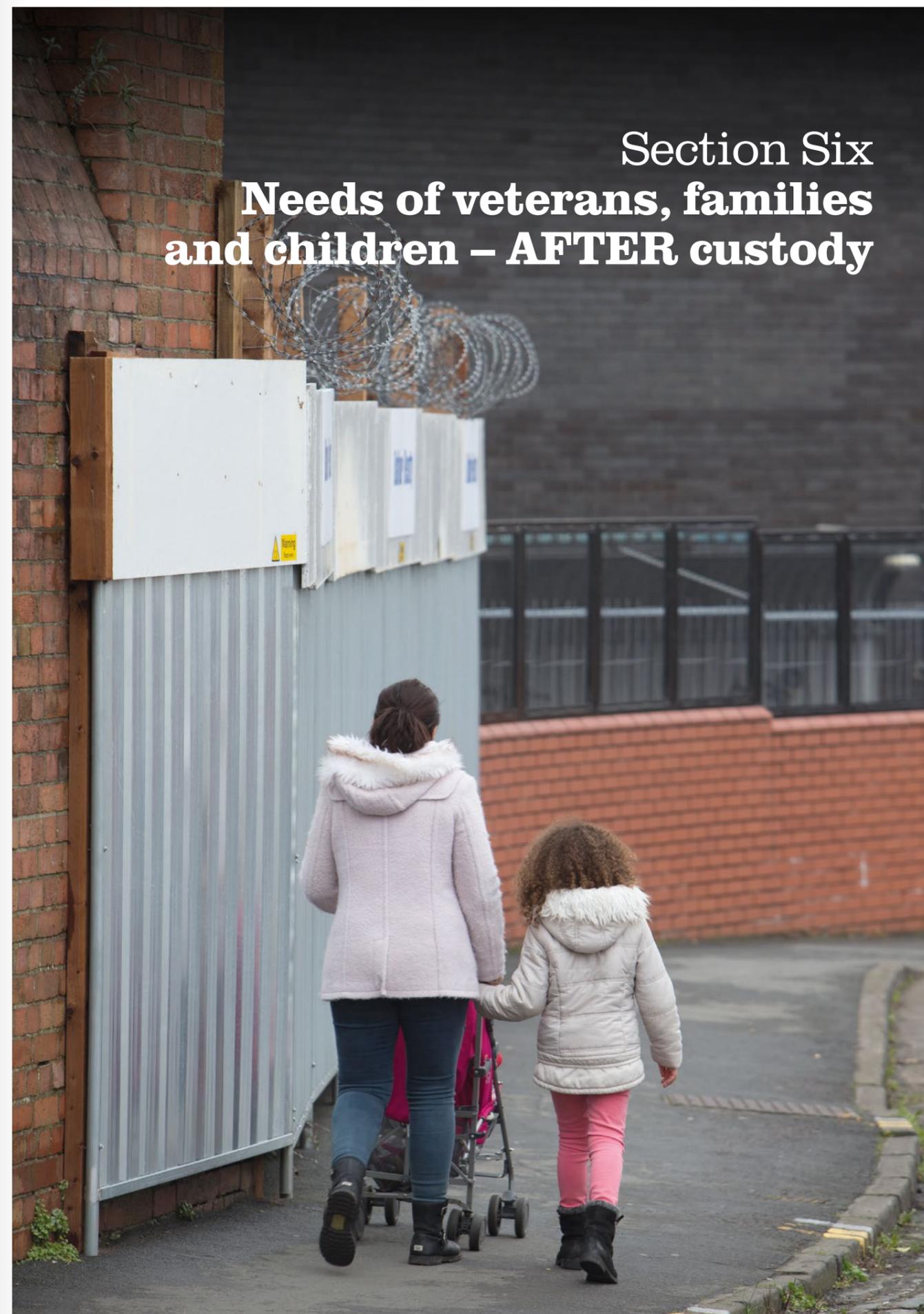
9. Asking questions, recording answers

Family circumstances to form part of standard assessments for veterans in custody, by both prison (VICSO, veteran representatives, and key workers) and charity professionals. Once this data is recorded, it is measurable and a clearer picture of needs and what support is on offer/being accessed can be established.

10. Holistic practice

To ensure children and family members' needs and wellbeing are supported and safeguarded, we recommend one organisation takes the lead in coordinating support for the family and/or children with a parent in prison. For veterans' families, there is huge value to specialist support where the nuances of military culture are understood alongside expertise in family work. This whole-family approach to work needs to be assertive and not just sign posting, offering ongoing emotional as well as practical support. This should include taking advantage of existing opportunities/materials³⁶ and creating new strategies to raise awareness of family support available and services pro-actively engaging with families.

36. <https://www.nicco.org.uk/directory-of-resources>



Section Six Needs of veterans, families and children – AFTER custody

Section Six

Needs of veterans, families and children – AFTER custody

In this section, we will consider the needs of veterans, families and children, as the veteran undergoes a second significant transition from custody into the community. Arriving at the final stage of the criminal justice journey, this chapter will also reflect on all the findings up to now, concluding this needs assessment.

6.1 The second transition

6.1.1 Out of custody....

Unlike civilian prison residents, veterans leaving custody experience a second significant transition. Much like their first transition from military to civilian life, the real challenges seemed to begin when they were back in the community.

“The main area of difference is the concept of transition. When they are leaving prison they are undergoing a second transition from the military and then one from prison. If they haven’t transitioned well out of the military, it is compounded a second time but with the addition of a criminal record.”

(Professional)

“In that respect it is not as much of a cultural shock when they go in, it’s when they come out.”

(Professional)

Following the “bath tub” metaphor, for the veteran and their families there is a build-up of anxiety in the run up to release. This is when support is most likely to be accessed, either voluntarily or as part of the resident’s

resettlement plan. Much like experiences of leaving the military, many veterans reported feeling ‘dropped’ when they were released and reflected on how this contrasts with their arrival into custody.

“You’re met when you arrive in prison and you are checked and you are helped and you’re guided and held all the way through your prison [sentence] and then they just open the door and say you’ve got to walk a mile up there and here is the bus route.”

(Veteran Representative)

The anxiety around release being the ‘real challenge’ was reported by children as well:

“It depends at what age it kind of happens because if you are quite young then it has more of an effect when the parent comes back. They go through life thinking it’s normal and that’s basically what’s happened to me. It becomes so normal that the real change is when they come back. And then you start to feel weird when things are normal for everyone else but for you it’s weird. It gets flipped.”

(Child)

6.1.2 ...into the community

Staged resettlement plans or release on temporary license (ROTL) were reported by 2 veterans coming to the end of their sentence/back in the community. There are four types of ROTL³⁷ and two relate to preparing to return to the local community, family and/or parental duties. This enables the family to gradually get used to the father being back at home in the year running up to their release and was described positively by a child we interviewed.

37. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/release-on-temporary-licence>

“When it [ROTL] was first happening, it felt more like...I hate to say this, I really hate to say this...it would be like “ahh it’s one of those days” because it was like that kind of unspoken thing, like he’s here and no one wants to talk about why he is here, why he is back and why he has to go back...It’s weird, he’d be home for the day and I’d be like.... I don’t feel myself that day, I feel like I am putting on this kind of act...I don’t know. I wouldn’t feel myself. But now it feels more relaxed to the point where I don’t feel myself when he’s not here...that’s getting normal...”

(Child)

The challenge of this cross over period of resettlement for another child was also expressed by a mother we interviewed:

“[He] was really struggling, in fact, he’d just done his first lot of home leave, just the days, the day release, and [son] were kind of just couldn’t really cope with why he was coming and going you know...That were a really difficult time.”

(Partner)

There was a sense that this improved over time as the family gradually got used to their father being at home again. Following ‘Recommendation 2’, this re-introduction into the family home is something that professionals noted as significantly lacking when servicemen return to their family home on discharge or following operational tours. A senior manager at a prison we interviewed felt there was a lot that could be learned between military and prison resettlement processes. The level of veterans entering custody, he felt, reflects the problems with current military resettlement and that things could be learned, both positive and negative, from the criminal justice resettlement process.

“...in an ideal world I would create some kind of strategic body that sits between the two, military discharge/criminal justice, so that you could have a very real impact on reducing the amount of military personnel that end up drifting into criminal behaviour in prison because of a poor resettlement process into civilian world.”

(Professional)

For instance, this ex-military professional working in the charity sector highlighted the need for a structured re-integration of service personnel back into the family home after time away. Rather than going straight from being away to being at home full time, he suggested slowly decreasing work hours and increasing family time before full leave.

“You are away for 6-8 months in a dodgy place where people are dying and you come home and go on leave for 3 weeks. The wife’s coped, the kids have been fine and you start jumping up and down because you are not used to the little ones running around doing what they want; that’s your perception it’s not the reality but you are used to telling Harry to do something and he does it straight away because he is a Private and you’re a Sergeant. And you are back with the family full time. No, re-integrate it, so they are in work, see their mates and then give them the two weeks leave.”

(Professional)

Whether this is returning from an extended period of working away whilst serving, transitioning out of the military (regardless of reason for discharge) or release from custody, this staged resettlement demonstrates consideration for the needs of the whole family and gives time for unavoidable tensions to settle within the family home.

Section Six Needs of veterans, families and children – AFTER custody

The tensions that arise within the family home when the veteran father is released from custody were described as being rooted in the mother and father doing what they need to survive. Inside, the father adapts to the structure of prison and outside, almost at the other end of the spectrum, the family's survival depends on the mother becoming fiercely independent to keep life going for them and their children. This is likely to be the experience for non-veteran offenders and families, but for veterans, this is compounded by a lack of familiarity with 'independence' as a legacy of military life, as mentioned in Section 4. Consequently, when the father returns to the family home full time, these two worlds may clash as demonstrated in the quotes from two couples below.

Couple 1:

"...she's become very, very independent, and all credit to her. And I've become very, I suppose I've become dependent on the prison service, and I'm re-establishing my own independence again."

(Veteran in Custody)

"At first it was strange, just getting used to...I think with me, I am very proud and it was letting him back...I would feel embarrassed if there was a cupboard and he would go in and it was messy and he would say 'oh I'll help' and he would see it as helping whereas I would see it as, you have let yourself go now."

(Partner)

Couple 2:

"...we were bad, we were bad me and [wife] when I first came out, we were arguing like hell, well not arguing, bickering and that, don't forget she's been on her own for 3 and half years, doing everything herself, doing it her own way and I'm coming back sticking

my size 9's in saying no we're doing this you know what I mean? We were like that for, I don't know, 4-6 weeks and we talked and everything else and I'll be honest, at minute we're the best we've ever been, all the time we've been together, and that's a lot to do with me changing from what I used to be to what I am now."

(Ex-offender Veteran in the Community)

"When he first came out, you know...I didn't look forward to that, you know he'd come out for 4 days and I was like, oh will you please go back. Because it was my rules, it was the way I did things, I went to bed when I wanted to go to bed, you know, everything was down to me and then letting him back in again and he was like, why don't you let me do that, and I'm like, because it's habit, I'm used to you not being around, I'm used to doing everything."

(Partner)

We asked a child interviewed if ROTL helped and if so, why:

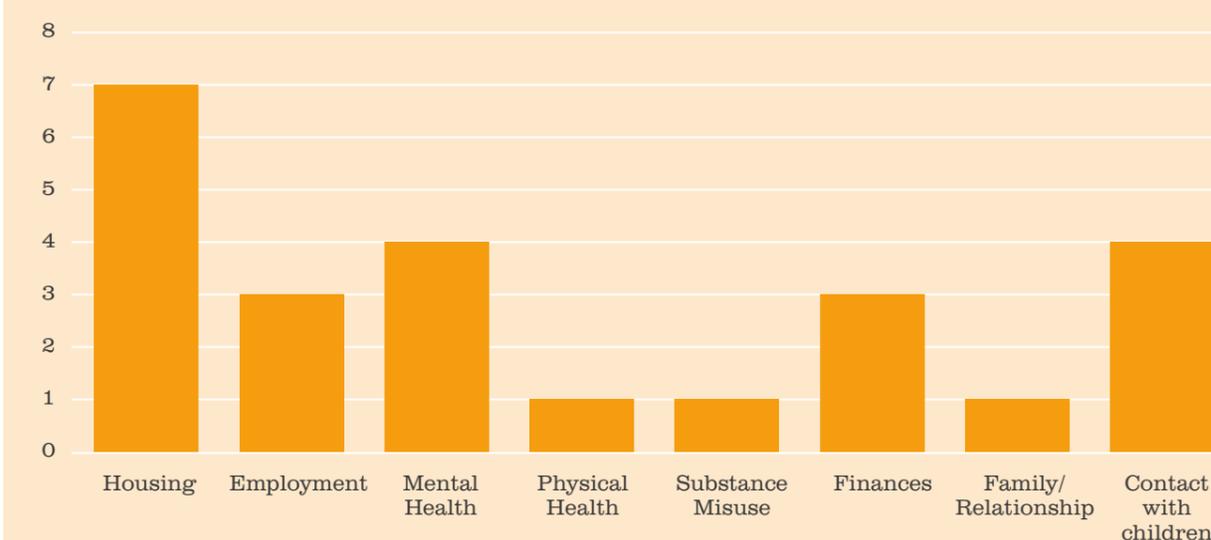
"Oh yeah, definitely...because of that clash of personalities, the ROTL helps you deal with that in chunks rather than he comes home and there is two months where you're all screaming at each other because no one knows what they should do or how they should talk or act in front of each other. At the start he is like a stranger, so it is good to have chunks of getting to know them again rather than having them dropped on you."

(Child)

Out of the 18 veterans interviewed, 16 were in custody and only 2 had been released back into the community at the time of interview. Therefore, the information gathered from the veterans in custody about their needs on release, was based on prior experiences and/or what they envisaged the future would hold on their release.

6.2 Resettling in the community

Diagram 6: Support needs of veterans after custody



In contrast to the needs identified before and during custody, housing was the primary need identified for veterans returning to the community. This was followed by mental health – a consistent need throughout the whole journey through custody, albeit significantly reduced on release. Contact with children, employment and finances followed. There is a notable drop in identified need around substance misuse which, due to the majority still being in the controlled environment of custody, is arguably aspirational rather than realistic. This will also impact the tendency to minimise problematic alcohol misuse, as discussed in the previous sections.

6.2.1 Housing

"...how about it's really nice if you don't mind, it's really good to have houses, and if you don't have one, or do, have a good day every single day and even when your day is bad have an amazing life."

(Child)

This child quoted above made frequent reference to the importance of a house. Unprompted, she started our interview by making the speech above and when asked why houses are so important, she explained: "Because...because it gives lots of memories." She spent the rest of the session making houses (below) for all her toys, including our character, Dudley the Dog.



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For 7 out of the 18 veterans interviewed, housing was an identified need on their release into the community. As identified prior to entering custody in section 4, housing was recognised as a need which, if not addressed, places the veteran at very high risk of spiralling back into offending.

“...homelessness it takes me every time. I first went homeless in 2013 back in [city] and ended up in here. I went homeless again back in 2017 and found myself back in jail.”
(Veteran in Custody)

This veteran’s partner and mother to two children expressed her worries about the plans for him to go into a homeless night shelter at the end of his current sentence. She worried that the instability of the night shelter, where he would have to check in/out each evening/morning would increase his vulnerability, especially in the context of historical alcohol misuse.

“...he’s still fighting demons, do you know what I mean, and it’s very easy to say I’m not going to do this, I’m not going to do that, when none of those temptations are presented to you because you’re in prison. But when you come out and it’s there and you’re not getting any support from anywhere else and people are putting you in quite horrendous situations, I’m just worried that they’re setting him up for failure”
(Partner)

The instability of night shelters or other forms of temporary accommodation can have huge impacts on establishing regular and secure employment. For this Veteran Representative, through his own experience and supporting other veterans in custody, he felt employment, family and housing were key to successful transitions back into the community.

“It’s just the same old...money, families and somewhere to live. I think the main one is homelessness at the moment...I haven’t got friends or family to go back to and before I came in here it took me about 6 months to get a flat and then 6 months later I’m in jail for something that happened years ago. I’ve lost that flat now. So it’s literally getting out and finding somewhere to live that can give us stability and structure.”

(Veteran Representative)

“My main focus is to sort my life out before I can be there for my kids. So I was trying and they released me from jail... and they released me into a bail hostel that was a crack den so it was inevitable that I was gonna relapse. And I relapsed straight away. And I cut my tag off and went rogue.”

(Veteran in Custody)

“...for now its stability. If I can stop myself from going homeless. If I go homeless, that’s when I’m vulnerable to the streets and I start messing up and I start coming in here.”

(Veteran in Custody)

Specific housing support for veterans was available either via military charities helping with funding to secure private rental accommodation or, depending on specific regions, charitable housing providers with specific accommodation for veterans.

This specialised support was regarded highly and following a push to advertise the accommodation within HMPSS, an employee of a veteran homelessness project reported a huge increase in number of veterans leaving custody using their service. From this accommodation, they were able to bring other forms of specialised veteran support such as mental health, family contact, domestic abuse and substance misuse. This same employee highlighted the importance of early intervention as many veterans entering their accommodation post-custody are dealing with ongoing and multiple needs in the context of broken relationships and deep feelings of shame and embarrassment as a veteran who has been into custody.

“...what work is done while they are in service as well? What...that pre-planning, it could be that when medical or dishonourable discharge...I think that work needs to be done on that before they enter the criminal justice system”

(Professional)

Once again, the issue of responsibility is raised in relation to the MOD’s role in identifying and adequately addressing the support needs of Service personnel prior to leaving the military and their role in offering ongoing support throughout their transition and life back in civilian community.

6.2.2 Mental Health

From 11 prior to custody and 10 during custody, the numbers of veterans identifying mental health needs on release dropped to 4. Three of these veterans reported that they would actively seek support from the NHS on release, including medical and/or psychological support.

As the majority of the veterans interviewed were imagining their needs on release and for the main part felt that they were positively managing their mental health within prison, it is possible that this may change nearer to or after their release. One of the veterans in the community felt he would be able to deal with his ongoing diagnosis of PTSD on his own, with the support of his wife:

“No, I’ll deal with it myself now, I can’t be arsed. Me and my wife will deal with it, she always know when I’m not right, she picks up on it straight away”

(Ex-offender Veteran in the Community)

And his partner explained:

“I think he’s changed because he wanted to change, I think he’s changed because he knew what he was going to lose. I think his psychologist [in custody], I think she’s helped him quite a bit, but [other] than that. [Is it something he’s looked into at all to continue in the community?] It’s time... that’s the thing...we did look at, because he used to do some counselling sessions, but they were just like, they weren’t like tailored to one thing...they’ll be a huge waiting list as well though won’t there?”

(Partner)

Long waiting lists and time (alongside full-time employment) were given as a barrier to asking for mental health support from the NHS and equally, the high cost of private mental health treatment. Placed in the context of military families being socialised to be self-sufficient, working as “a unit, you don’t share your business” (Section 4.3.2), this potentially places increasing pressure on the mother and children to support the veteran’s needs.

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In the context of the aforementioned “clash of personalities” once the father returns home, being able to access information or services to increase understanding or develop strategies to manage this initial period of re-integration could be a positive step forward. There is a clear window of opportunity here to increase the chance of positive integration and strong family ties which in turn, may reduce the likelihood of the veteran re-offending. Two of the families we interviewed reported that, in preparation for or since the father’s release, they were considering couples counselling.

“I think that’s something we’ll need to discuss at some point. Because I think, coming out of prison, there are a lot of hidden elements of your life that you’re not really ready for.”

(Veteran in Custody)

The other couple, with the support of probation, had sought funding from a military charity for counselling sessions. They reported that this request was turned down due to the father having a criminal conviction. Eventually they found a local charity offering free counselling for couples. We are not able to verify this specific claim but it reflects a recurring theme from this research, that punishments administered to the veteran (whether directly or indirectly) not only punishes the veteran, but potentially their family as well. This secondary punishment has been identified in the families of the wider offender population³⁸ and highlights the importance of a whole-family approach to criminal justice work.

6.2.3 Family Contact

For 26 out of 43 of the children included in this research it seemed they could expect some contact with their father once he was released. From the perspective of the veterans we interviewed, 8 reported they believed they would

be either returning to their family home and/or regular contact with their children; 1 was already back at the family home; 6 reported receiving unclear messages about contact on release; 1 was currently released and under assessment from social services with a view to return to the family home; and 2 were clear that they could not have contact with their children on release. As we could not corroborate these reports from fathers or clarify the extent to which social services were/were not involved, we cannot make any conclusive statements. What we can say is that many of the fathers expressed uncertainty about what would happen when they were released. They often appeared to be guessing or their understanding of the situation was based on their perception rather than having received a clear message from safeguarding/risk management professionals.

“...it’s the only thing that’s really playing on my head you know, obviously I just want to get out and see my kids straight away but I don’t want to break anything which I’m not allowed to do right. I don’t really know what I’m allowed to do...At the end of the day they want to keep me out of jail and the only way they are going to keep me out of jail is to keep me off the streets.”

(Veteran in Custody)

Equally, many were unsure of where to go to ask for support around contact with their children on their release.

“...if I had to guess I’d say you go through social services and they’d maybe try and help you.”

(Veteran in Custody)

Some were very reflective about the impact of their past behaviour, and how their attempts to distance themselves (and their negative behaviours) from their children may not have been the best decision for their children.

“I think if there’s a level of honesty, I’d love to be able to sit down with my kids right now, I couldn’t do it before, because I was not in the space, but sit down and say do you know what I’ve not been in your life as much as I should have done because I’m a bad person. For some twisted reason I thought that if I kept the bad away from you then it wouldn’t harm you. Well keeping the bad away from my kids has meant harm because it meant their dad wasn’t there.”

(Veteran in Custody)

As already discussed in relation to supervision expectations during arrest/sentencing in Section 4, this lack of clear and timely information was very difficult for mothers trying to ascertain what kind of family life they would be having once the father was released.

“I mean he’s not going to be on tag or anything, no, he’s not on tag, so nobody’s made it clear, nobody’s been very forthcoming with information about whether he’s going to be allowed to come down here at the weekends, whether he’s allowed to stay here at the weekends. Presumably that’s all dependant on an assessment by children’s services which you know, they know the release date is coming up because I told them but they haven’t made any effort to get in contact at all or do anything so I don’t know.”

(Partner)

A veteran we spoke to who was in custody and very recently had been told contact was no longer allowed with his children queried what impact this would have on the support his ex-partner and/or children could access from military charities.

“Well I think, it is what they put in last week because now I have been cut off from making any contact, I don’t know if that affects any support for them. I know I’m coming out soon but if I’m in here for longer, will that bar them from getting any support?”

(Veteran in Custody)

As mentioned in previous sections, access to military charity support predominantly relies on the veteran making the link in the first instance. Therefore, it is likely that there are many partners who are separated from/have no contact with the father of their children who are aware of or able to access support potentially available to them.

6.2.4 Finances (and employment)

Finances and gaining stable employment on release understandably go hand in hand. Much like housing, employment is key to reducing the chances of reoffending. For those returning to a family unit, there was a sense of pressure to secure employment to support the family financially, but equally to ‘prove’ their worth after being in custody.

“I think I’m going to be a workaholic when I come out and the problem I’ll have is that I’ll be focusing so much on the business that I’ll end up neglecting family again. Not because I want to but because I won’t want to be coming back into that house without bringing something to the table. I want to be able to arrive and say ‘guess what, dad’s alright’ you know, I can do this without breaking the law, I can provide for you a stress free life, not worry about the bills and give you something better than you’ve had over the last 7 years.”

(Veteran in Custody)

38. Sutherland & Wright, 2017.

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Much like the experiences around finding employment after leaving the military, there were varied responses about the ease with which veterans might find employment after being in custody. Adding a criminal conviction to their military service seemed likely to compound difficulties in finding employment for many. Some veterans spoke of past sentences where disclosure of their criminal convictions meant they struggled to get interviews, or their employment was terminated with immediate effect. A smaller number of veterans interviewed, predominantly those who held specialised roles in the military (such as signals or engineering) spoke very confidently about finding work on their release and envisaged earning high salaries in sectors such as railway engineering or water companies. A veteran in the community who served as an engineer in the Royal Air Force for 22 years shared his experience of finding work post-custody:

“I’m a rail engineer...I just walked into this one, there wasn’t even an interview...they love people from the military because the way we work, our discipline of work and our quality is pretty much higher than anybody else out there because it has to be...In fact they love us that much, two of the lads I work with now who started the same day as me, one’s navy and one’s army, they’re all aircraft mechanics. Yeah so it’s easy for us to get that sort of thing.”

(Ex-offender Veteran in the Community)

Working in the railway industry was mentioned most frequently and made accessible via training course delivered within the prison estate. Alternative options for employment mentioned made accessible via courses on offer at the prisons were: the fitness industry, gas engineering and tiling and decorating. Accessing employment via agencies in partnerships with the prison estate was regarded as positive as it meant there was no need for secrecy or worries of being ‘found out’.

“[Last time] I had to go hide that I was a criminal and when I got caught out I lost my job and I don’t want to go down that path again. I want to go somewhere that accepts ex-offenders, I don’t have to hide anything, there’s nothing, I know I’m secure, I know I’m not going to lose the job and that’s what I want to do.”

(Veteran in Custody)

Military charities which offer support to access education and training opportunities were mentioned on several occasions, although some reported mixed responses or lack of motivation to ask for this support. The importance of family or friends in securing employment was mentioned on several occasions and as reported in ‘Section 4’ of this report, also seeking employment in industries or business run by ex-military personnel. 2 veterans were actively planning to start up their own businesses on release to support and employ veterans with experience of being in the criminal justice system. This entrepreneurial spirit is a positive example of addressing employment issues but is possibly a demonstration of the tendency of Service personnel to opt for ‘going it alone’ rather than having to rely on or trust others.

3 veterans mentioned the French Foreign Legion, 1 before their custodial sentence and 2 were planning to apply once they were released. As well as the obvious similarities this work has with their service in the Armed Forces, in terms of the impact on the family, this would again involve long-term absence of the father from home. Other forms of employment which involved extended periods of paternal absence were mentioned, such as private security and industrial management. Opting for employment which involves long-term absence from the family home is in stark contradiction to many veterans’ acknowledgement of the negative impact their previous absence has had on their family and children. Whenever the father is away, it is the partner that remains to maintain the family home.

In the case of one family where the father had been back in the community for 4 months, both parents worried about the impact him working away might have on the children. As the mother explained:

“I think that’s going to be a bit, they’re going to think hmmm what’s happening now? You know, because we used to have to count down to daddy coming, daddy’s 4 sleeps, then when daddy came home we had daddy’s forever sleeps. So that’s the way we did it, you know ‘when’s daddy’s next 4 sleeps?’ in 25 days, 25 sleeps until daddy’s 4 sleeps. But I think that will, that does worry me. But he’s got to work so...”

(Partner)

They explained this anxiety might be increased because initially the children were told the father was ‘at work’ when he went into custody, before later finding out the truth. Evidently, as discussed in Section 5, what parents’ decide to tell the children about the father’s imprisonment is likely to impact their level of trust in the information given by their parents in the future.

For one family, the veteran committed his crime very close to completing his full 22 years of service. This had financial implications for the whole family as they would not be in receipt of his pension until he reached the age of 60 years old.

“...he was meant to get it when he turned 40, but because of his crime, he won’t get it until he is 60. So it is quite a big thing to lose...we had plans and everything for that money.”

(Partner)

Once again, the family and children are negatively impacted by the father’s criminal conviction.

6.2.5 Families and Children

Rising up our “bath tub”, it is likely that for most families, levels of uncertainty and anxiety start to rise in the build up to the father’s release and their initial months in the community. To fully understand this, the relationship prior to custody must be considered as any issues occurring before, unless they are acknowledged and addressed with the family, may start to surface again once the father is back at home/ in the community. Further research would help to understand the long-term effects of parental imprisonment on the family and children. During this initial period of release, it is possible that families have much higher needs (due to challenges around re-integration) or lower needs (a possible ‘honeymoon’ period) than later years.

The return of the father from custody was largely regarded as positive for the partners and children we spoke to.

“Since release, ah that was just...going to collect him was just very surreal but just great, great to have him back and being able to see the children for them to have that contact again. That relief, we know he is safe, that he’s well. Yeah back amongst us. I think we are still day by day...he sees probation each week. We don’t know what the future is going to hold for us but it’s just looking at it positively and moving forward.”

(Partner)

“[Do you get to see him now?] Yeah. More often, I like it. And not on the phone, I like it like that. [You like to see him in person?] Yeah. I like more people in person, more than phone.”

(Child)

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It is important to note that all the families we spoke to were together at the point of interview and it is likely that things would be different for families separated from the veteran. However, the majority of partners we spoke to implied that their relationship with the father had been 'off and on' over the years and had experienced periods of separation during previous releases.

"Past releases have been bad because there've been a couple of occasions where things were still not good between us and I hadn't been informed that he was being released, so there were quite a few occasions where I thought he was still inside and he'd like show up at my door."

(Partner)

One partner reported her commitment to 'stand by' her partner. She explained that this got her through the last sentence but would not extend to another.

"Every time, I'm not going to, you've got to haven't you, I married him so, I've got 3 kids so yeah I'm going to stand by him. I won't do it again. I would do it if he got recalled for some silly reason, but I won't go through another big sentence again, I just wouldn't do it, I'm not going to put my kids through it either."

(Partner)

Response from children were sometimes conflicting, with mixed feelings of unhappiness and excitement about their father returning home. For instance, when asked about her father coming home, this child explained she would feel:

"Umm...pretty good. But when he's here I won't be very happy."

However, she later described feeling sad when he went away and, re-affirming the value children place on time with their parents, looking forward to him returning to:

"Play[ing] with the cushions, and build[ing] a tower."

(Child)

As discussed in Section 6.1.2 in relation to ROTL arrangements, there is a necessary period of 'adjustment' experienced by all family members as the father returns into the community. As this father in custody explains, thinking ahead to his release:

"At this point, I am in their lives but only to a certain extent so...just the adjustment I think of being there again and knowing they can come to me again and they don't have to just speak to me over the phone or once a week in person that I'm always there. I think that would be the thing. And also the worry that if certain things happen, that I'm going to react in a certain way or if there's financial struggles then I'm gonna go back to dealing..."

(Veteran in Custody)

As identified in Section 5.5, there is a sense of children feeling responsible for their father's behaviour and their absence being a reflection of whether they are 'good enough' to keep their father at home. As a professional reported:

"...well weren't we good enough to keep him on the straight and narrow?" "weren't we good enough for him to want to stay out, weren't we good enough for him not wanting to be in trouble?"

(Professional)

A child we interviewed reflected these feelings when sharing his worries about his father returning home:

"For a while I struggled with thinking I wasn't good enough, I think what was in my head was my Dad has been thinking about the kind of son he wants and when he comes back he'll look at me and think that's not him."

(Child)

These anxieties may also be compounded by regular professional intervention in the family home to monitor and manage risk to children.

"And normally when people turn up [child] will run away, she doesn't speak to people, she walks in and she normally puts people who come into her house and want to speak to us and to her about what's happened, are people that are stopping me coming home. As soon as she finds out you're talking about that she normally runs off."

(Ex-offender Veteran in the Community)

As we were only able to interview a small number of families with their father back in the community, to understand the needs in fuller detail, further research would be necessary with more families, including children of various ages. For fathers still in custody, their ideas of their future release and the impact this may have on their families were aspirational and generally based on the belief that they would be able to continue the good work they had demonstrated in prison (e.g. abstinence, educational attainment, regular contact). Evidently the extent to which this positive change can be sustained depends on the environment they return to which encompasses family relationships, employment, housing, finances, the wider community and what support is on offer/accessed.

This section provides further support for 'Recommendation 10', where one national body should take responsibility for children of offenders. This would ensure appropriate advice and information is made available to service users (e.g. what and how to tell children about their parent's imprisonment) and the oversight of effective communication between professionals/agencies.

6.3 Support Available - 'Through the Gate'

The support available specifically to veterans and families 'through the gate' was equally as variable as their first transition out of the military and into/through the criminal justice system. This depended on things such as the length of military service, type of offence, location, and perception of needs. This huge variety was reflected in veterans and families expressing a lack of knowledge and/or vagueness about the support on offer and how to access it.

"I know that people have been to see him in there, but me and his mum and dad have spoken about, is this support going to continue or is this something that gets offered to them while they're in prison and then what happens then? Once they're out the door, does it then stop? Is it something that he has to seek out?"

(Partner)

6.3.1 Ongoing support from the military

What support was available from the military seemed clearer for veterans who had served for longer in the military. For the small number of veterans interviewed that were close to completing their full service, they referred to various forms of support from their unit and, for some, a plan to complete their military resettlement once they were back in the community.

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Just as we have seen in the transition from military to civilian life in Section 4.2.4, this lack of formalised support from the military places ESLs and their families at higher risk of negative outcomes in this second transition from custody to the community.

6.3.2 Prison to probation

In terms of the VICSO support, in a minority of cases where the role had profiled hours this support extended up to and beyond the veteran's release from custody. This could take the form of physically picking up the resident on the day of release providing 'through the gate' support, signposting, referrals to community services and/or sporadic 'check-in' phone-calls in the weeks following release.

"So the benefits I have personally as a worker, I'm in contact with a lot of veterans who are released, send me a text, how are you doing? Has so and so been in touch, are they still in touch, are they still working with you?"

(Professional)

For this VICSO, his post-release support was tailored to each individual and focussed on ensuring both the veterans and any community support they were linked up with prior to their release were following through with this commitment. This would inform his decisions around what charities he invited to offer support in his estate, making sure he only worked with agencies which 'walk the walk' as it were:

"If the information comes back that it was all talk...you will not be welcome here."

(Professional)

Probation was mentioned rarely by veterans and families, most likely due to the majority of veterans interviewed still being in custody.

For the small number of interviews where probation was mentioned, it was predominantly in relation to compulsory assessments, courses or meetings the necessary boxes they had to 'tick' in order to complete their sentence. Turnover of staff or safeguarding issues were reasons given for mistrust or difficult relationships with probation. The mother quoted below, expressed a great deal of frustration in 'chasing up' probation in the run up to her partner's release:

"It's all a bit vague, everything very vague and you feel like you have to chase, constantly chasing probation. She's rarely there to speak to and I feel like just no one is very forthcoming with details of what he is and isn't allowed to do, which is risky, considering you know, they're letting him out on licence and you'd think they'd be a bit more forthcoming about what he can and can't do. [And if he ends up breaking...] he'll be recalled immediately and it'll be no one else's fault but his own when in actual fact is it?"

(Partner)

Decisions made by probation are intrinsically linked to children and families as their assessment of the veteran's risk would feed into social service assessments where a similar level of 'vagueness' was reported. Families reported that often very little would happen throughout most of the custodial sentence and then suddenly happen all at once just before or after the veteran's release (as mentioned in Section 6.3.3)

Positive experiences of probation were reported where officers had made efforts to get to know the family as well as the father, some conducting home visits, contacting the mother on the phone or simply asking questions to open up conversations about family life in the lead up to and after release:



"When I met up with him a couple of months ago, my new probation officer is really good. He said 'how's things with you and the wife' and I thought that's interesting that he's asked that, that's something that he's obviously encountered before."

(Veteran in Custody)

6.3.3 Military Charities

As identified in previous sections, within the plethora of military charities, a small number offer support to veterans in the criminal justice system and this varies widely between prison estates and geographical regions. In terms of 'through the gate' support this appears to be smaller still, with most support either in initial stages of development or specific to certain needs e.g. housing, procuring funding for white/brown goods or education/employment support. Military charities are evidently skilled at providing a high degree of practical support but there is little evidence of ongoing emotional support. Most veterans were aware of support available and advised they would access this, either directly or via probation, if things started to go downhill. Even then, this veteran in the community saw this as a 'last resort' and described his feelings about going into a drop-in centre:

"I'd feel awkward walking in there and asking because I don't think I'm at that level where I need that. Even if worst came to worst and I lost my job and [my wife] kicked me out, I've got lots of friends and family that would take me in...I'd have to be on the streets and stuff like that and I don't think I would."

(Ex-offender Veteran in the Community)

Charities providing prison in-reach support reported varied 'transitional' support, sometimes collecting veterans on their release day and supporting them to access community services.

A professional explained that he felt competition for funding amongst veteran charities can often take over what should be the primary focus of supporting the veterans themselves:

"...a lot of veteran charities, they going for this funding or that, going for the same bag, I can't work with them and I can't work with them....sometimes it's like a school ground and I've had to get them together to say stop it. The people that you are working with are falling through the cracks. They are falling through the cracks because of you, please work together. You can do something different to what he's doing, know what he's doing different, cos if you can't do it, pass them onto him. It's about the guy."

(Professional)

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CASE STUDY 6:

Care After Combat – Project Phoenix

This project is unique in offering in-depth peer mentoring support for veterans in custody across the transition into the community. The support starts in the final 18 months of their sentence and continues up until 12 months after their release. Project Phoenix operates in selected prison estates; it is specific to the veteran (no family support) and is not available to veterans convicted of sexual offences.

All mentors undergo formal training, initially validated by the National Offenders Management Service and upgraded quarterly as part of their ongoing professional development.

We interviewed one veteran who engaged informally with the project whilst in custody but did not sign up to the whole programme. He explained that he did not feel he needed the additional support but benefitted from informal mentorship and had in fact been asked to train to become a mentor himself. He was keen to do this but reported that his full-time work prevented him from taking on any additional volunteering.



Some professionals identified the lack of young veterans in the workforce providing support as a potential barrier to the veterans in need. One VICSO reported actively encouraging veterans leaving custody to volunteer, but the voluntary nature of this work was a barrier for most veterans whose main objective on release has to be employment.

“The 50yr old guys who have seen frontline service in the Falkland Islands or Northern Ireland is very different to a young guy who has seen 3, 4, 5 back to back tours in Afghanistan. So, I’ve signposted a few people to [military charity] in the hope that they go and do the caseworker training and they can give something back. But again that is voluntary, it is not paid employment”

(Professional)

6.3.4 Family Work

There was very little mention of family support post-custody. Any mention of military charity support for families was generally in relation to practical support as previously mentioned. Support from a social worker and/or family support worker was mentioned where contact arrangements were being assessed.

6.4 Recommendations

11. Shared Learning

There is a key opportunity for the MOD and HMPPS to share learning and strategies around military and custodial resettlement. Adopting strategies which consider the practical and psychological impact for veterans and their families, with an opportunity for gradual re-integration back into family life and to increase the chances of positive family relationships in the community.

12. Joint ‘through the gate’ practice

This would be reinforced by established VICSOs services with profiled hours (Recommendation 7), enabling VICSOs to offer formalised support for veterans between custody and the community. This coordinated support should extend to families by joint working with and between probation, regional Armed Forces Covenant groups, the police, military charities, children’s services and/or other community services/specialist support. This multi-agency working ensures clear communication and shared support planning, acknowledging the expertise and role of each agency.

13. Paid opportunities for peer support

Military charities offering paid roles for veterans released from custody to provide support/mentoring to veterans in custody. This would increase representation of Service experience in military charities and ensure consistency of services, training and documentation across regions.

14. Continued research

In acknowledgement of the limited information we have on the experiences of families post-release, further research should be undertaken to understand the short and long-term impacts of criminal justice on families and family relationships when the veteran parent returns home.

Conclusion

This report explored the needs of veterans in custody, their families and children. We considered their needs before, during and after custody and placed this in the context of past military service which varied in terms of role and experience, length of service and reason for leaving. There was also significant variance between the length of time between the veterans leaving military service and entering the criminal justice system.

The vast majority of existing research into why and how veterans enter the criminal justice system focusses on the veteran with very little consideration for the wider impact on the family left at home. The absence of the father from the family home can be seen as a common theme during military service and custodial sentences. On the one hand, this can provide a greater sense of resilience but on the other, this increased sense of self-sufficiency can isolate families and children and act as a barrier to reaching out for support. This is compounded further by an apparent lack of knowledge around what support is available, particularly for families who are separated from 'their' veteran and/or families who were not present whilst the veteran was in the military.

Many of the findings in this report are reflected in the experiences of families of the general offender population. There is no doubt that more specialised support is needed for all children of offenders which includes support for key caregivers in their lives such as parents and teachers. This should also include one agency taking responsibility for overseeing and supporting children of offenders. In the context of limited funding opportunities, free resources exist on the NICCO³⁹ website to support any professionals working with children of offenders. Individual practitioners can adopt these resources to suit their service and,

due to the complexity of cases, develop collaborative ways of working with other agencies and sharing expertise.

This research would benefit from a larger consultation with families and children. Our ability to identify families and children was greatly limited by the lack of formal reporting of family data by agencies involved. This, and the tendency for families to avoid asking for help or not knowing what or when to ask for help, means that many families are not accessing any support or if they are, only when they are in crisis. For those that did participate this was one of the few and for some the only time, they had been asked about how this experience was for them. They were unsure what they should deal with alone and when to ask for support. Partners and children spoke of wanting spaces to share with peers who have gone through the same experiences as them and for professionals to ask questions and above all, to listen. Further research is needed to gain more insight into the experiences of families and children, including looking into experiences post-release to understand the long-term impacts for veterans, their families and children.

We acknowledge the actions taken by the MOD to improve resettlement planning and support on offer. We feel these efforts need to go further still, especially for the veterans and families who are particularly vulnerable on leaving such as ESLs and/or those dishonourably discharged. In terms of early intervention, the MOD has a responsibility to assess the needs of recruits and provide ongoing support to service personnel and their families throughout and after their service. This should be made directly available to dependents, separately and in addition to support for the veteran as well as addressing the structures and culture of the military which can make some Service Leavers vulnerable to family breakdown, substance misuse, mental health issues and criminal activity in civilian life. All these factors are classed as ACE's, and require early intervention to reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes for children in later life.

The risk of family breakdown during and after military service could be reduced further by the provision of education to increase families' awareness of military life and transition for veterans and vice versa, to increase serving personnel's awareness of the impact of military life on their families and children.

This report indicates a level of unmet need for children and families connected to fathers with military experience who have gone on to commit significant crime. In order to support

the work of the MOD, HMPPS and other public and charity professionals working with veterans in custody, we would urge the adoption of the recommendations made in this report.

We recognise that funding will be required to achieve this, to invest in further training and service development initiatives. Much can be learnt from the existing evidence of good practice and innovative collaborations between public agencies and the charity sector inside and outside of the custodial setting.



39. www.nicco.org.uk

Glossary of Services

A list of support services for veterans, offenders and families. These support services were either involved in this research project or were mentioned by those we interviewed. This is not a full list of the support available in the UK.

Support for Veterans & their Families

Active plus

Area covered: Devon, Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire

Active plus use the skills, experience and expertise of injured military veterans, and those suffering from PTSD, to deliver courses and activities for people who are unemployed, older people who are lonely or isolated, people with health conditions, including mental ill-health, and young people at risk of leaving school without qualifications or work.

www.activeplus.org.uk 01326 567174

Alabaré: Homes for Veterans

Area: South of England and Wales

Alabaré's Homes for Veterans provide supported accommodation to British Armed Forces Veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

They provide dedicated support to Veterans across the South of England and Wales - specifically; Wiltshire, Hampshire, Gloucestershire, Devon, Dorset as well as North and South Wales.

www.alabare.co.uk 01722 322 882

Care after Combat

Area: National

Care after Combat provides professional assistance for the wellbeing of veterans and their families, with a focus on alcohol misuse and on veterans within the CJS.

They launched project Phoenix in 2015, which offers mentorship to Veterans in Custody during the final 18 months of their sentence and for at least 12 months following release, with the aim of reducing the number of re-offending veterans released from prison.

www.careaftercombat.org 0300 343 0255

Combat Stress

Area: National

A charity specialising in veterans' mental health, supporting those with mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and PTSD.

They offer a range of treatment services in the community, at specialist centres, on the phone and online, and develop a personalised programme for each veteran's individual needs with a combination of psychological and psychiatric treatment, and occupational therapy.

www.combatstress.org.uk 0800 138 1619

Help for Heroes

Help for Heroes offer physical, psychological, career, financial and welfare support to veterans with illnesses and injuries attributed to their service in the Armed Forces, and their families.

They offer a wide range of support including recovery programs, support hubs, grants, career advice, business experience, mental health support and programs for very seriously injured veterans

www.helpforheroes.org.uk 0300 303 9888

Military Community Veterans Centres

Area: Rotherham & the surrounding area

The aim of the MCVC is to provide an information service to help all serving and ex-service military personnel and their families, with members and volunteers on hand to provide advice on issues such as health care, housing, employment and benefits.

They also run weekly and fortnightly meetings where the veterans of Rotherham and its surrounding areas can get together to share their stories and discuss aspects of their day to day lives.

www.rotherhammccvc.org.uk

NHS Veterans' Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS)

Area: National

This is a dedicated local-community-based service for veterans and those transitioning out of the Armed Forces with a discharge date.

NHS Veterans' Mental Health Complex Treatment Service (CTS)

Area: National

An enhanced local-community-based service for ex-service personnel who have military related complex mental health problems that haven't improved with earlier care and treatment.

www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/military-healthcare/nhs-mental-health-services-for-veterans/

Project Nova

Area: East of England, North West, North East and South Yorkshire and Humberside.

Project Nova provides support to Veterans who are arrested or are at risk of arrest. It is delivered as a partnership between The Forces Employment Charity (RFEA) and Walking With The Wounded (WWTW).

The organise support for: accommodation; employment, education and training; drugs and alcohol; finances and debt; mental health; children & families; attitudes and thinking.

www.veteransgateway.org.uk 0800 9177299

PTSD Resolution

Area: National

PTSD Resolution is a charity that offers counselling to UK Armed Forces' Veterans, Reservists and families to relieve mental health problems resulting from military service.

PTSD Resolution therapists also work in prisons, and there is an active programme of engagement with the prison service nationally.

They also offer employers Trauma Awareness Training to support the successful integration of Veterans and Reservists in the workplace.

www.ptsdresolution.org 0300 302 0551

The Ripple Pond

Area: National

A UK wide self-help support network for the adult family members of physically or emotionally injured Service Personnel and Veterans. Offering support in the form of: group meetings; a private online forum; a confidential advice and support from staff members; and a buddy system.

www.theripplepond.org 0333 900 1028

Glossary of Services

Royal British Legion (RBL)

Area: UK & Overseas

RBL provide a wide range of support for those in the Armed forces, veterans, and their families, from providing expert advice and guidance, to recovery and rehabilitation, through to transitioning to civilian life

They offer direct support to veterans in custody, and their families, whilst in prison and on release.

www.britishlegion.org.uk **0808 802 8080**

SPACES

Area: National

Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex Services, SPACES, is a housing advice and placement service for veterans. They help to secure appropriate accommodation across the UK for those who leave the Armed Forces to reduce the risk of homelessness or rough sleeping.

www.riverside.org.uk/care-and-support/veterans/spaces/ **01748 833797**

SSAFA

Area: UK & Overseas

SSAFA provide a wide range of support for Armed Forces, veterans, and their families. Their focus is on providing direct support to individuals in need of physical or emotional care.

SSAFA has a prison “in-reach” team that work with veterans serving prison sentences and representatives visit prisons through the UK. SSAFA will also provide on-going support on release. They also provide support for families of veterans in custody and on release.

www.ssafa.org.uk **0800 731 4880**

Veterans Contact Point

Area covered: Coventry and Warwickshire

A service created by, staffed by and ran by veterans for veterans.

They provide a confidential and free service for veterans and their families living and working in Coventry and Warwickshire.

www.veteranscontactpoint.co.uk

Veterans Change Partnership

Area: National

The VCP is specifically intended to provide comprehensive and intensive residential programmes of rehabilitation, intervention and support to those former military personnel and their families, who have entered or are at risk of entering the CJS.

www.veteranschangepartnership.co.uk
07779221162

The Veterans' Gateway

Area covered: National

A partnership between The Royal British Legion, Poppy Scotland, SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity, Combat Stress and service provider Connect Assist. Funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund.

They provide the first point of contact to a network of military and non-military partner organisations.

www.veteransgateway.org.uk **0808 802 1212**

Veterans Outreach Support (VOS)

Area: Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight

VOS has been providing a monthly drop-in facility for ex-serviceman and their direct family members since July 2008. The Drop-In is a welcoming and relaxed place for UK veterans and their direct family members to come for confidential welfare or psychological support or simply to meet for a sociable chat. Representatives from numerous agencies attend the drop in sessions to offer a wide range of support.

www.vosuk.org **023 9273 1767**

Warrior Program

Area: National (Residential Courses based in Wiltshire/North Yorkshire)

The warrior program works with serving personnel, veterans and adult family members. They provide residential courses to enable individuals to manage their emotions and to develop resilience, focus and motivation, using a specially developed programme to meet the demands and challenges experienced by members of the Armed Forces and their families.

www.warriorprogramme.org.uk/veterans/
0808 801 0898

Hugh James Solicitors

Area: National. Offices in Cardiff and London.

Hugh James Solicitors have a team specialising in military service legal matters and help military service personal who need to bring a claim against the MoD due to a failure to adequately protect from illness or avoidable injury. They offer also offer advice on wills and probate, and independent financial advice.

www.hughjames.com **033 3016 2222**

Support for Fathers / Separated Families

Families Need Fathers (FNF)

Area: National

FNF is a UK charity supporting dads, mums and grandparents to have personal contact and meaningful relationships with their children following parental separation or for those whose children's relationship with them is under threat. They offer information, advice and support services for parents on how to do the best for their children. They offer support via a national telephone helpline, local branch meetings, counselling support groups and online support.

www.fnf.org.uk **0300 0300 36**

Separated Dads

Area: National, Web-based

Separated Dads is a web-based resource supporting separated fathers. This site brings together numerous articles and guides covering support topics such as; emotional; financial; legal; negotiation; practicalities; psychology; separation and court processes. They also offer an online forum.

<http://www.separateddads.co.uk/>

Support for Offenders and Families

Prison Visit Centre Services

Visit centre services operate at each prison, offering support and advice to families and prisoners. The centres are run by charities such as PACT, Nepacs, Ormiston Families, Barnardo's or Spurgeons. To find out who provides the service at a specific prison visit the Prison Information page at

www.justice.gov.uk or at www.nicco.org.uk.

Glossary of Services

Storybook Dads

Prison-based

Story book dads is run within prisons and facilitates and encourages prisoners to make bedtime story discs and other educational and personalised gifts, such as memory books, calendars and pop-up books, to send home to their children.

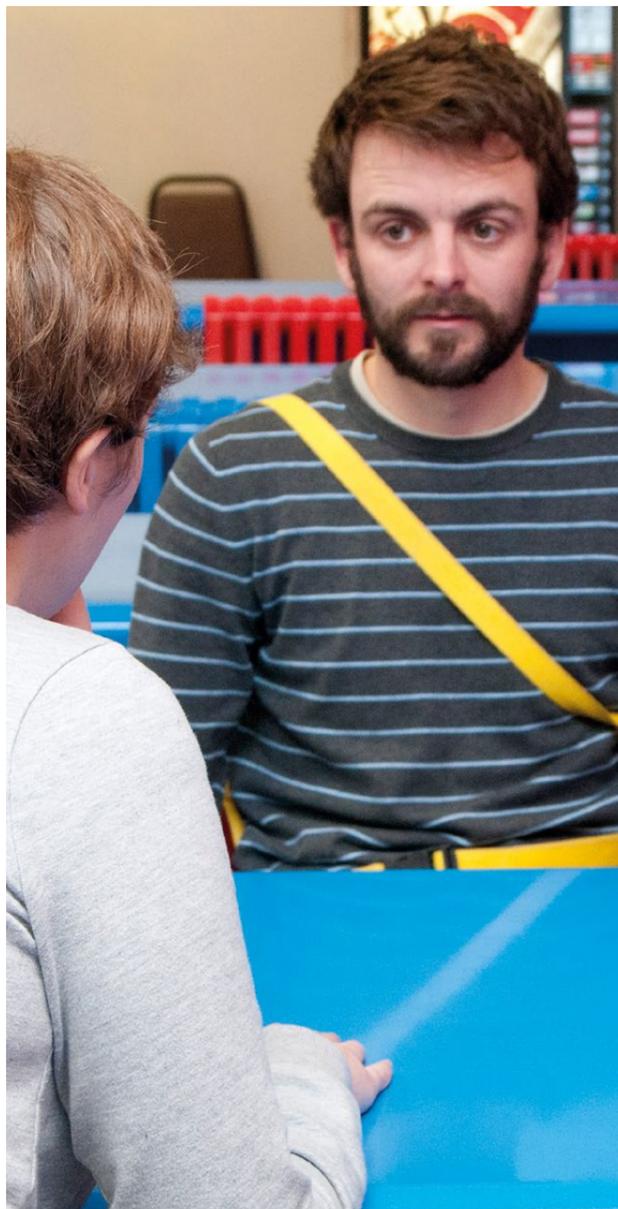
www.storybookdads.org.uk

Barnardo's Invisible Lives

Area: Essex, South East

This project operates in Essex, providing information, advice and support to children, young people and families affected by parental offending behaviours or the criminal justice system. This involves 1-1 support and group sessions to address the needs and worries of children with a loved one in any stage of the criminal justice system. They also liaise and train relevant agencies, such as schools, to enable them to better support children in their care.

<https://b.barnardos.org.uk/essex-capi-service>
01268558448



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Appendix 1 List of Expert Steering Group Members

Organisation	Role	Individual
Anglia Ruskin University, Veterans & Families Institute for Military Social Research	Research Fellow	Linda Cooper
Barnardo's	Team Manager West Midlands Prisons	Debbie Bailey
	Invisible Lives and Children Affected by Service Separation, Project Worker	Sarah Sardar
	Service Manager – Invisible Lives	Suzanne Page
Care After Combat	Head of Research	Nick Murdoch
Catch 22	SW Cluster Manager	Alexandra Pace
Help for Heroes	Head of Evaluation and Assurance	Allie Bennington
HMP Stafford	Previous Veterans Lead and Families	Anna Cottam
HMP Stoke Heath	Head of OMU	Selena Bradley
	Previous VICSO	Richard Hadley
	EDI Officer	Neil Hursthouse
HMPPS	Activities Hub Manager	Ben Fisher
HMPPS	Group Reducing Reoffending Lead – South Central	Guy Blackstone
Kings College Centre for Military Research	Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist	Dr Deirdre Macmanus
	Co-Director of the King's Centre for Military Health Research	Nicola Fear
	Senior Research Associate	Marie Louise Sharp
Project Nova	North of England Manager & Deputy National Lead	Steve Lowe
Royal British Legion	Research Manager	Andy Simpson
Service Manager	Barnardo's Invisible Lives	Suzanne Page
Sheffield Hallam University	Senior Lecturer in Criminology	Katherine Albertson

Appendix 1

List of Expert Steering Group Members

Organisation	Role	Individual
SSAFA	Head of Specialist Services	Gary Williams
	Veterans in the Criminal Justice System Specialist Advisor	Yasmin Jankowski-Doyle
Veterans Contact Point / Remember Veterans	Executive Officer	Len Hardy
West Midlands Police	Superintendent & Representative of West Midlands Combined Authority	Sean Russell
	Veterans Peer Support Network Co-ordinator	Johanna Comer
York University	Education and Development Lead (Military Culture and Transition), Military Human Training	Nick Wood



Appendix 2

Interview Schedule

Interview questions: veterans in custody

Personal details

1. Age
2. Ethnicity
3. Marital status
4. Disability

Details of sentence

1. When did this current prison sentence start? (month/year)
2. When is your expected release date? (month/year)
3. Type of offence?
4. Have you served a custodial sentence before? If yes – how many times, type of offences and for what lengths of time?

Family circumstances

1. Age and number of children?
2. Did you live with your children prior to entering custody?
3. If 'no' did you have regular contact with your children prior to entering custody?

Military experience

1. So what age were you when you joined the military?
2. How would you describe your life before the military (including childhood)?
3. Why did you join the military?
4. Which branch of HM Armed Forces did you serve? What was your role?
5. How long did you serve in the military for?

6. Did you complete any operational tours? How recently?
7. When and why did you leave the military?
8. How long after leaving the military did you start your custodial sentence?
9. Were your children born while you were still serving in the military?
10. If 'yes', did you live with your family in military quarters and how long for?
11. What do you miss if anything about the Forces?
12. How did you feel when you left the military?
13. What did you do on leaving?
14. Were you and your family provided with any support on leaving the military? If 'yes' who from?

Contact with family during sentence

1. Do you have regular contact with a partner?
2. How do you maintain this contact?
3. Do you have contact with your children? If 'no' or 'occasionally', what is the reason for this?

Your support needs

1. When entering custody for this sentence did you disclose you were ex-military?
2. If 'yes' – at what point did you disclose and who did you inform?
3. If 'no' – were you ever given the opportunity to let people know and/or what were the reasons you chose not to inform the prison staff?
4. Do you know of any specialist support or programmes or information that is offered to ex-military in this establishment/in other establishments where you have served sentence?

Appendix 2 Interview Schedule

5. Do you know of any specialist support or programmes or information that is offered to fathers in this establishment/in other establishments where you have served sentence?

6. Is there anything that you think stops ex-military personnel getting support while in custody?

7. Prior to entering custody did you have any of the following support needs:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Housing | <input type="checkbox"/> Employment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical health |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disability | <input type="checkbox"/> Finances |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drugs or alcohol misuse | <input type="checkbox"/> Family/relationship issues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child contact arrangements | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |

8. Did you feel you had any support needs directly related to your military service or veteran status?

9. Did you receive any support with any of these needs?

10. Where did you receive support from?

11. How effective was the support?

12. Before entering prison did you ever receive support from:

- Combat Stress
- Veterans Aid
- The Royal British Legion
- The Army Benevolent fund
- Veterans in Custody Support (VICS)
- Veterans in Prison
- The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA)
- The NHS
- Help for Heroes
- Any other group who work with ex-military personnel?

13. During your current custodial sentence have you or your family had any of the following support needs?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Housing | <input type="checkbox"/> Employment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical health |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disability | <input type="checkbox"/> Finances |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drugs or alcohol misuse | <input type="checkbox"/> Family/relationship issues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child contact arrangements | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |

14. Have you received any support for any of these needs?

15. Where have you received support from?

16. So how effective was the various support you've talked about?

17. While in prison have you ever received support from:

- Combat Stress
- Veterans Aid
- The Royal British Legion
- The Army Benevolent fund
- Veterans in Custody Support (VICS)
- Veterans in Prison
- The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA)
- The NHS
- Help for Heroes
- Any other group who work with ex-military personnel?

18. When you are released and resettled, do you think you will have any of these support needs?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Housing | <input type="checkbox"/> Employment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical health |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disability | <input type="checkbox"/> Finances |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drugs or alcohol misuse | <input type="checkbox"/> Family/relationship issues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child contact arrangements | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |

19. Are you aware of what support is available to you upon your release?

Support for your family

1. Do you know of any specialist support or programmes, information or benefits that are offered to children or families of ex-military personnel?

2. Do you know of any specialist support, programmes, information or benefits that are offered to children or families of prisoners?

3. Is there anything that you think stops ex-military personnel's families getting support while their family member is in custody?

4. Have you accessed any support or intervention during your time in custody that has supported your family relationships?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mediation | <input type="checkbox"/> Counselling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting programme | <input type="checkbox"/> 1:1 support from family worker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family visits | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

5. When you left the Forces, how did this impact on your children and family? (positive and negative)

6. How do you think your involvement in the criminal justice system has impacted on your children and family?

- At point of arrest
- During sentencing
- During custodial sentence
- When you are released

7. Do you think the children and families of ex-military personnel in custody have any different needs to the families of other prisoners? If 'yes' how are these needs different?

8. Have your children and family received any support from any agencies:

9. When you left the Forces?

10. When you entered custody? (details of support provided and by whom)

Recommendations for developing improved support

1. What support should be made available to ex-military personnel in prison? (pre-sentencing, custody and release)
2. Who should provide this support and how?
3. What would make it effective support?
4. What support should be made available the families of ex-military personnel in prison? (pre-sentencing, custody and release)
5. Who should provide this support and how?
6. What would make it effective support?

Final questions

1. This interview is being undertaken for the Barnardo's in order to better understand the experiences of ex-military personnel in custody and their families – is there anything you want to add?
2. Is there anything I should have asked?
3. How did the interview feel for you?

Appendix 2

Interview Schedule

Interview questions: partner

Personal details

1. Age
2. Ethnicity
3. Gender
4. Marital status
5. Disability

Details of partner's sentence

1. When was your husband/partner's last prison sentence? Current / date(month/year).....
2. How long was he sentenced to?
3. What type of offence was he sentenced for?
4. Had he served a custodial sentence before that instance? If yes – how many times, types of offences and for what lengths of time?

Family circumstances

1. Age and number of children?
2. Did your partner live with you and your children prior to entering custody?
 Yes No

If 'no' did he have regular contact with your children prior to entering custody? Yes/No

Detail:

Military experience

1. When and why did you partner/co-parent join the military?
2. In which armed forces did he serve? What was his role?
3. Did he see active service?
 Yes No
How recently?
4. How long did he serve in the military for?
5. How would you describe your life when your partner was in the military?
6. When and why did he leave the military?
7. How long after leaving the military did he begin his last custodial sentence?
8. Were your children born while he was still serving in the military? If 'yes', did you live in military quarters and how long for?
9. What did he do on leaving?
10. How would describe your life since your partner left the military?
11. Were your family provided with any support on his transitioning to civilian life? If 'yes' who from?

Contact with partner during sentence

1. Have you had regular contact with your partner? If yes, how have you maintained this contact?
 Telephone (frequency)
 Social visits (frequency)
 Letters (frequency)
 Emails (frequency)

2. Has your partner had contact with your children?
 Yes frequently Yes occasionally No
 Telephone (frequency)
 Social visits (frequency)
 Letters (frequency)
 Emails (frequency)
 Family visits (frequency)
3. If 'no or 'occasionally', what is the reason for this?

If partner has been released

1. Has your partner returned to the family home?
 Yes No
2. If no, does your partner have contact with the children and if so how regularly?

Support for you & your children

1. Do you know of any specialist support or programmes, information or benefits that are offered to children or families of ex-military personnel?
2. Do you know of any specialist support, programmes, information or benefits that are offered to children or families of prisoners?
3. Have you or your children been offered or have you accessed any support or intervention during your partner's time in custody that supported your family relationships?
 Mediation Counselling
 Parenting programme 1:1 support from family worker
 Family visits Other

4. Have you received any financial assistance from the Assisted Prison Visit Unit? (if not – did you know that it existed?)
5. When your partner left the Forces, how did this impact on you and your children? (positive and negative) How did you feel?
(Prompts: finance, health, childcare, children, parenting, employment, housing, emotional wellbeing, relationships, time management)
6. How has your partner's involvement in the criminal justice system impacted on you and your children? How did you feel?
(Prompts: finance, health, childcare, children, parenting, employment, housing, emotional wellbeing, relationships, time management)
 At point of arrest
 During sentencing
 During custodial sentence
 When you are released
7. Have you and your children received any support from any agencies:
a) When your partner left the Forces? (details of support provided and by whom and how you accessed support)
b) When your partner entered custody? (details of support provided and by whom and how you accessed support)
c) When your partner was released? (details of support provided and by whom and how you accessed support)
8. Do children and families of ex-military personnel in custody have any different needs to the families of other prisoners? If 'yes' how are these needs different?
9. Is there anything that you think stops ex-military personnel's families getting support while their family member is in custody?

Appendix 2 Interview Schedule

Veteran's support needs

1. When your partner entered prison, did he disclose he was ex-military?
2. Do you know if your partner was offered and/or received any specialist support, programmes or information that was specifically for ex-military personnel in prison?
3. Do you know if your partner was offered and/or received any specialist support, programmes or information that was specifically for fathers in prison?
4. Is there anything that you think stops ex-military personnel getting support while in prison?
5. Has your partner had any of the following support needs before, during or after serving his sentence in prison?
 - Did he receive any support with any of these needs?
 - Where did he receive support from?
 - How effective was the support?

	Before custody	During sentence	After custody
Housing			
Employment			
Mental health			
Physical health			
Drugs or alcohol misuse			
Finances			
Disability			
Family/relationship issues			
Child contact arrangements			
Other (please specify)			

1. Did you feel he had support needs directly related to his military service or veteran status?
 - What support did they provide you/your partner?
 - How effective was the support?
2. Has your partner ever received support from the following agencies?
 - What support did they provide you/your partner?
 - How effective was the support?

	Before custody	During sentence	After custody
Combat Stress			
Veterans Aid			
The Royal British Legion			
The Army Benevolent fund			
Veterans in Custody Support (VICS)			
Veterans in Prison			
The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA)			
The NHS			
Help for Heroes			
Any other group who work with ex-military personnel?			

Recommendations for developing improved support

1. What support should be made available to ex-military personnel in prison? (pre-sentencing, custody and release)
2. Who should provide this support and how?
3. What would make it effective support?
4. What support should be made available the families of ex-military personnel in prison? (pre-sentencing, custody and release)
5. Who should provide this support and how?
6. What would make it effective support?

Final questions

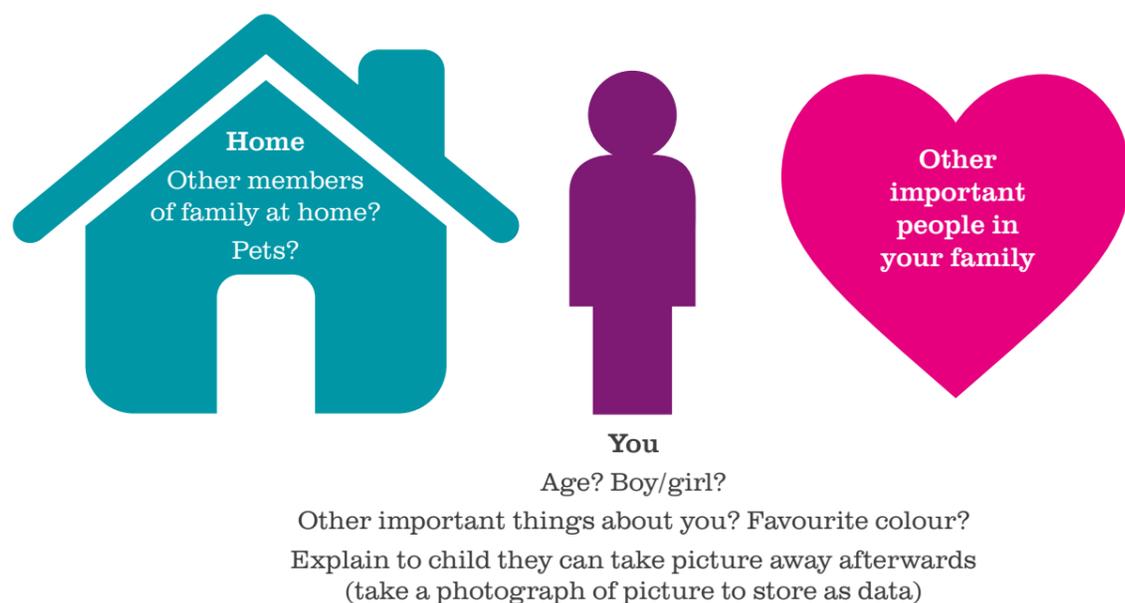
1. This interview is being undertaken for the Barnardo's in order to better understand the experiences of ex-military personnel in custody and their families – is there anything you want to add?
2. Is there anything I should have asked?
3. How did the interview feel for you?

Appendix 3

Children's Interview Tools

Children's Interview/Activity Schedule (younger children)

Tell us a bit about you:



Activity exploring experience of having a parent in prison:

- Very young children: Dudley the Dog exercise (see below)
- Slightly older children: Creating a character
 - Draw outline of a character on flip chart
 - Ask child to give character name, age and hobby.
 - Explain that the character's Dad has just gone away to prison
 - Attach/draw on images to character to prompt questions:
 - **Brain/thought bubbles:** What is the character thinking about? What questions might they have? What is going on inside their head?

- **Heart:** how is the character feeling? What sorts of feelings do they have in their body? What are the good feelings? What are the bad feelings? Why are they feeling like this? (have some emojis/facial expressions re emotions for children to choose from if needed)
- **Eyes:** what can the character see going on around them? Has anything changed since their Dad went to prison? Does anything look different?
- **Smile:** what makes the character smile/feel happy? What could help to make the character feel happy if their thoughts and feelings are not feeling very good?
- **Hand:** who might the character want to hold their hand to help them understand what is going on or to make them feel safe?
- **Rubbish bin standing next to character:** Imagine the character could just chuck away the bits of their life that they are not enjoying – what might they chuck away?

Children's Interview Tool: (Dudley the Dog)

Tool taken from: Barnardo's 'Supporting children and families affected by a family member's offending – A Practitioner's Guide' by Lindsay Sutherland and Polly Wright, February 2017

Dudley the dog can help young children to talk about their thoughts and feelings.

All you will need is flipchart paper and pens.

Simply follow these 5 easy steps...

1. Introduce the child to Dudley the dog.
2. Ask them to draw Dudley nice and big in the centre of the flip chart paper.
3. Explain that Dudley's family member has gone to prison.
4. Ask the child to write down inside Dudley any feelings they think he may be experiencing.
5. Ask the child to write any questions Dudley may have in the space around Dudley.

This is a great way to get young children to talk about what's going on. By using Dudley the child will feel like 'I' is less intrusive and you are more likely to get positive engagement.

Now that you have opened up the subject of imprisonment you can ask the child if they can relate to any of these feelings and explore any questions they may have. It's a great place to start.



Barnardo's believes in **stronger families,**
safer childhoods and **positive futures** for
vulnerable children and young people.

If you need further information or other fundraising
activities and events – please visit our website:

www.barnardos.org.uk/get-involved



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