

Forces in Mind Trust

Impact
Report
2024



FiMT
forces in mind trust

Chief Executive's Welcome

Forces in Mind Trust was established with the vision that every ex-Service person and family can transition successfully to civilian life. In the past 14 years, we have developed the evidence, encouraged collaboration, and influenced policy and practice to secure this future.



2024 saw the launch of reports which aimed to prevent homelessness for former personnel, and that called for better support for groups identified at most risk of poor transition outcomes, such as non-UK Service personnel and families. We have also worked to enable greater cross-sector collaboration to tackle big issues, including bringing together senior leaders to talk about the impact of artificial intelligence and to identify and address future challenges for the Armed Forces community.

The Centre for Evidence for the Armed Forces Community, funded by FiMT, continues to grow, expanding its repository and resources to provide an accessible, digestible and trusted evidence base for researchers, policy makers and practitioners working with and in the military research space.

We have established our key priority areas that allow us to focus on what we still need to understand in relation to successful transition outcomes, and what

needs to be done better, enabling us to identify and develop new opportunities to try to solve complex and enduring problems and improve the experience of transition for ex-Service personnel and families.

In particular, we recognised the importance of improving the understanding of the unique impact of Service life on families. There are around 55,000 military partners and an estimated 120,000 military children in the UK. However, our understanding of their experiences is not as well known as those of Service personnel. Projects in 2025 will look to address this and provide meaningful evidence to ensure they are supported.

It is critical that we continue to better understand the unique conditions and impacts of service on the health and wellbeing of personnel and families. With the foundation of 10 years of funding of mental health research, we have endeavoured to support the improvement of treatments for service-related

conditions, whilst widening understanding of the long-term impacts of Service life. We must also be forward looking and understand how the needs of the Armed Forces community will change over time, as this will impact their transition.

We aspire to support the Armed Forces community by empowering both the system and the individual, ensuring that personnel and families are better equipped for transition, and that the military and civilian ecosystems of support work together so that the needs of the Armed Forces community are appropriately understood and supported by civilian services. Together, we hope that our work will enable Service personnel and their families to have the most successful transition to civilian life possible, and to live thriving and fulfilling lives.

Michelle Alston, Chief Executive

Our New Priorities

What we need to understand



The unique impact of Service life on families



The unique conditions and impacts on health and wellbeing



The changing nature and needs of the Armed Forces community

What needs to be done better



Empower the system and individual



Increase collaboration



Improve awareness of Armed Forces in mainstream services

Who are we?

Every year, around 16,000 Service personnel and their families leave the UK Armed Forces.

Most Service leavers will transition to civilian life smoothly and go on to lead successful and fulfilled lives. However, a small minority struggle and need additional support when leaving the military. Forces in Mind Trust exists to support this group, with the vision that all ex-Service personnel and their families lead fulfilled civilian lives.

How do we make change?

Forces in Mind Trust is an independent charity, funded by a 20-year endowment from the National Lottery Community Fund to work to ensure that all Service personnel and their families make a successful transition to civilian life. We focus on three main approaches, using our funds to create lasting changes for the Armed Forces community:



Funding research and evidence generation to better understand the issues, and to identify and share what works.



Taking a collaborative approach to convening and catalysing change, working with decision makers across the United Kingdom.



Equipping those with the power to change policy and practice with the knowledge and understanding required to improve the experiences of Service leavers and families.

LH Alika Mundy UK MOD Crown © 2024



Promoting collaboration and empowering the system and individual

Sector insights

Support services for ex-Service personnel, whether through government provision or local support groups, need to work together to provide joined-up and effective support for ex-Service personnel and families. To help achieve this, organisations need to better understand the landscape of support on offer. We therefore released *Sector Insights: Armed Forces Charities 2024* with the Directory of Social Change in April 2024. The insights provided up to date information on the size, status and health of the Armed Forces charity sector, as well as the trends across the country that affected charities' provision of support to the Armed Forces community, such as a reduction in overall income and volunteers during the pandemic years.

Through this better understanding, provision of case studies, and highlighting of ideas for dealing with modern and evolving challenges, this report and its

previous iterations supports individual charities but also the development of policy. It also led to some additional financial support for the Armed Forces charity sector from Government during the pandemic.

Shaping the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant

The *Our Community, Our Covenant* project continued to shape the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant, in order to reduce any disadvantage that personnel or families may face as a result of service. Local authorities were supported in developing their own Armed Forces Covenant action plans through the use of the Theory of Change developed in our last report, resulting in them being better able to meet the requirements of the new Covenant Duty.

The Solent Armed Forces Covenant Partnership used the Decade of the Covenant Report in the development of their strategy to support the large Armed Forces community in the Solent area.

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One of the things I've noticed in my work with the Armed Forces Community is passion. This work is often led by passionate people, but that energy needs a common purpose. The work of FiMT and the *Our Community, Our Covenant* project is just that, a rock in what can sometimes feel like a sea full of competing and ever-changing priorities.

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Caroline Hopper, Portsmouth City Council



Our work on the Armed Forces Covenant was supported by our continued co-chairing with the MOD of the Community Covenant Action Group meetings. The group brought together representatives from local authorities across the UK and facilitated active group discussion. This has led to the identification of areas for improvement in the delivery of the Covenant within local authorities, as well as greater collaboration between authority areas and an enhanced understanding of key issues, and a sharing of solutions to drive ongoing improvements for the community.

We also presented the interim findings from the current *Our Community, Our Covenant and Beyond* project at the MOD's annual Armed Forces Covenant Conference. These findings have supported central and local government by highlighting examples of best practice, identifying the ongoing barriers, and outlining where structures can be put in place to achieve effective and proportionate delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant. The findings and evidence have been used to inform the Government's development of a potential widening the scope of the Covenant.

In 2024, we awarded a further grant to Shared Intelligence to update the *Our Community, Our Covenant* toolkit to take account of the changing context in which local authorities operate and to support them in ensuring that public services are well informed and ready to deliver support to the Armed Forces community.



Promoting collaboration

A key element of our strategy is to use our influence as a convenor and bring the right people together at the right time, with the best available evidence. We do this to enable greater collaboration, resulting in the development of more effective policies and practices that better support the Armed Forces community.

One element of this has been our sponsorship of the Working Together award at the Soldiering On Awards, which has allowed us to promote a collaborative approach to tackling the issues the community can face. This year's award to the Sunderland City Council Armed Forces Partnership, a unique alliance of organisations working to support the community, highlighted how a collaborative approach can result in more effective support for the Armed Forces community in their area.

Bringing evidence into policy

FiMT does not just fund research and evidence; we use the findings from the research to engage with decision makers, ensuring that our evidence informs decision making which benefits the Armed Forces community. Two of our key reports this year have related to tackling veterans homelessness and ensuring effective support for the non-UK community.

Ending veteran homelessness

In January 2024, we partnered with Riverside Housing Group and the University of York to launch *The Roadmap to End Veteran Homelessness*, a comprehensive report detailing the actions needed to move towards eliminating homelessness amongst former Service personnel. In recognising that experiences before and during service can all contribute to housing outcomes after leaving the Armed Forces, the report identifies where preventative interventions are best placed along the transition journey.

The report's launch in parliament and subsequent engagement saw FiMT raise actionable and specific changes with the policymakers responsible for them.



The Office for Veterans' Affairs and Ministry of Defence engaged with the project throughout its lifespan, and continue to use the findings and recommendations as part of their evidence based strategy to support ex-Service personnel, ensuring that our research is directly impacting government policy and service provision.

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This is an important piece of research which draws together evidence from across the service journey, from joining to serving to becoming a veteran. Whilst we know that most veterans transition well, understanding the common challenges some experience is vital. Research such as this supports our work in the Office for Veterans' Affairs to develop evidence-based policy interventions which support veterans and ensure their service is recognised and celebrated.

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Anisha Worbs, Director of Office for Veterans' Affairs, *Speaking on the Roadmap to End Veteran Homelessness*



Supporting the non-UK community

Our report with Anglia Ruskin University on the experiences of non-UK former Service personnel highlighted detailed evidence from over 100 non-UK participants and provided insights on the unique issues faced by a small but significant group in the UK Armed Forces who are under researched. This evidence has been used by the Cobseo Non-UK Cluster, in collaboration with research by RAND Europe funded by the Office for Veterans' Affairs, to raise the profile of the needs of non-UK personnel and their families with policy makers within the MOD and the Home Office to ensure that they are better supported.

Contribution to government consultations

In addition to using the evidence from recently published reports to engage with decision makers, we also use the evidence generated from our funding over more than a decade to contribute to government consultations – ensuring that they consider the issues that can create a barrier to a successful transition.

We responded to a number of consultations in 2024, and we raised issues such as the importance of early preparation to good transition and the need to recognise the role of supporting families in a successful Defence people strategy.

Alongside submissions to the Strategic Defence Review and the Office for Veterans' Affairs consultation on veterans, FiMT responded to Government's call for evidence on the 10-year Health Plan for England. In our response, we raised the unique issues faced by the Armed Forces community and highlighted effective solutions to remove the current variability, inconsistency and uncertainty in the support available for them. By sharing the evidence, we hope to ensure that the Department of Health & Social Care considers the needs of the Armed Forces community, building on the progress made in improving awareness and identification of former personnel, as well as through veteran specific support.

“Non-UK service personnel make up a small, but significant, group within the UK Armed Forces, and are a group who are under-researched, and arguably, as ARU/ FIMT's report highlighted, undervalued. The Cobseo Non-UK Cluster exists to gather evidence of the challenges and barriers faced by the serving and veteran non-UK community, and to champion change. This research was invaluable in helping the Cluster better understand the experience of non-UK personnel and their families.

Hannah Pearce, Co-Director of Campaigns, Policy and Research at the Royal British Legion and co-chair of the Cobseo non-UK Cluster

Supporting Service families



Health of veterans' families

We published the largest health and wellbeing study on families – the UK Veterans Family Study – hosting launch events in Belfast, Edinburgh, London and Cardiff. The events brought together senior leaders from devolved administrations, charities and UK-wide government to consider how to make their services more accessible to families. The Veterans' Commissioner for Wales used the evidence to brief the Welsh Cross Party Group on Armed Forces and Cadets and the project team worked with the Hywel Dda Health Board, informing improved practice and support.

The study found that overall, most veteran families appear to have good psychological health and wellbeing. However, it also identified areas where additional support may be required. The findings offered useful insights for ongoing research, policy, and practice and informed MOD's on-going work on delivery of the Families Strategy. In addition, these findings helped inform our response to the NHS's 10-year Health Plan for England call for evidence and informed our further funding decisions to support families.

Living in Our Shoes Revisited

In 2020, the *Living in Our Shoes* report highlighted the additional challenges faced by military families which can be detrimental to modern family life and relationships. The report made a substantial number of recommendations, of which almost all were accepted by the government.

Since then, some progress has been made towards supporting Service families, with families more strongly recognised and supported as a unique group within the Armed Forces community. However, there is more progress to be made to make sure that they are sufficiently supported.

In 2024, FiMT therefore funded the original report team to undertake the *Living in Our Shoes Revisited* project to measure progress on the recommendations of the report, their continued relevance, and what else needs to be done to support Armed Forces families in the future. The project was launched with strong engagement from stakeholders and is due to report in 2027, providing evidence to inform the refresh of the MOD's Armed Forces Families Strategy.

And Much More

Supporting veterans within the criminal justice system

Our commission into ex-Service personnel in the criminal justice system with Nacro and the University of Northampton highlighted the importance of “asking the question” about whether someone has served, to enable ex-Service personnel in the criminal justice system to be identified and able to access appropriate support. The findings were presented to the Cross-Party Group on the Armed Forces and Veterans Community, helping to ensure that those providing mainstream services understand the needs of former personnel and the support available

FiMT awarded funding to the Probation Institute to mobilise the transformation of research from our *Journeys to Harmful Behaviour* report published in 2022 into practice, focusing on the recommendations that have not yet been actioned. To ensure that the findings are being fully utilised, the Probation Institute will undertake a period of engagement with stakeholders in the criminal justice system and military sector to help them understand the recommendations and evidence, as well as support them to build capacity for change in the key areas identified.

“It was really important to have FiMT present the findings from their funded research into the identification of ex-Service personnel in the criminal justice system and the steps that can be taken to improve access to appropriate support in Scotland. The evidenced-based input of organisations like FiMT to the Scottish Parliament’s Cross-Party Group on the Armed Forces and Veterans Community throughout the year, and on this specific report, is essential to helping to address the challenges facing veterans and the wider Armed Forces community in Scotland. This research, coupled with the expertise and subject awareness of FiMT staff, has led to meaningful discussions and the development of services supporting veterans who have become engaged in the criminal justice system.”

– **Jim Wilson**, Veterans Scotland.

Improving health outcomes

We continued to look to address the unique health impacts of serving, including supporting research into new treatments for mental health conditions that can arise from service, particularly Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

This included working with Supporting Wounded Veterans and King’s College London to publish an early stage trial utilising MDMA-assisted therapy. The treatment was shown to be safe, allowing further research to be undertaken in order to provide new effective treatments for those living with treatment-resistant PTSD.

Standard treatments are not as effective for Complex PTSD. We therefore funded Edinburgh Napier University to conduct new research on the first intervention to specifically target Complex PTSD with UK ex-Service personnel. This has informed current updates to NHS guidelines in Scotland, influencing mainstream service treatment for complex PTSD.

Previous research has highlighted that ex-Service personnel who survive a major traumatic injury have an increased risk of early death and early onset of diseases which would normally be associated with old age. We therefore awarded funding to the University of Birmingham to investigate how trauma – both physical and psychological – can result in accelerated ageing amongst ex-Service personnel. The aim is to help policymakers better address ill-health resulting from service and make sustainable transition more achievable for ex-Service personnel.

The Centre for Evidence for the Armed Forces Community, funded by FiMT



The Centre continued to grow in its mission to put evidence at the heart of decision making. The Centre is run by RAND Europe and King's College London and funded by Forces in Mind Trust, and aims to provide the most accessible evidence base on transition.



Collaboration

Central to its mission, the Centre holds a continually expanding repository of over 7000 research articles on Service personnel, ex-Service personnel and Service families in both the UK and abroad. It also provides information on current research activity, offering routes to collaboration across the sector. The Centre provides a platform for researchers working with the Armed Forces community to highlight their work to a wider audience. The Centre team has published a series of 'spotlights' to raise the profile of individual experts, further the reach of research, and maximise collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Research Landscape bulletins created by the Centre collate available data on what research is ongoing in the sector which helps identify evidence gaps. The bulletins help the sector to plan further research as well as provide a summary for policymakers of what research is currently being conducted.

Evidence into impact

In May 2024, the Centre held their annual conference focusing on impactful research. The conference brought together academics as well as service providers and policymakers with representation from the Ministry of Defence and Office for Veterans' Affairs, as well as the charity sector. The topics were wide-ranging and included the impact of and treatment for service-attributable physical injuries such as blast injuries and the experiences of ex-Service personnel attaining housing and accessing support in the benefits system.

The conference also helped researchers share methods to improve future research and how it can be translated into real change. For example, on the benefits of multidisciplinary teams, including engineers that could bring solutions to uncovered research issues to provide better support for physical health conditions.

Research and policy summaries developed by the Centre bring together current research evidence on specific policy areas, allowing readers to better understand the current issues, support and gaps in understanding and to inform policy and practice. In October 2024, the Centre launched their Employment

Research and Policy Summary. The summaries provide a focus on the evidence currently available on employment outcomes and also on the progress made and the changes that need to take place to better support the Armed Forces community in achieving successful civilian employment.



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The Centre has grown to be an authoritative resource for evidence and research on ex-Service personnel and families in the UK and internationally. Since running in its new form as a consortium between RAND Europe and King’s College London starting from 2022, it has grown to be a valuable tool for researchers to collaborate and provide accessible updates on evidence and research to policymakers that can improve the lives of the Armed Forces community.

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Mary Keeling, Deputy Director at the Centre for Evidence for the Armed Forces Community, funded by FiMT

Chair's Message

Placing FiMT in the context

As Chair of Forces in Mind Trust, I'm honoured to be part of an organisation that plays a vital role in improving the transition journey for our Armed Forces community. FiMT has never worked in isolation, we thrive within, and contribute to, a dynamic and ongoing dialogue involving government, local authorities, researchers, charities, and, most importantly, the Armed Forces community itself. Our strength lies in our independence and our ability to bring the right people together, around the right evidence, to drive the right decisions.

We've always valued and welcomed insight from across government, service providers, academia, and the charity sector. But at the heart of our work is the perspective of serving personnel, veterans, and their families. Their voices inform the work we fund, whether through participation in surveys, interviews, or wider engagement in our research projects. This inclusive approach is fundamental to our mission of improving transition outcomes.

Our financial independence, free from fundraising pressures, gives us a unique position to ensure no

part of the transition landscape is overlooked. We have always championed the recognition of diverse needs across different cohorts, and this is strongly reflected in the pages of this report. Looking ahead, I'm especially pleased to see FiMT placing a greater emphasis on families. This includes the launch of a focused project on Service children and young people, building on our continued support for the *Living in Our Shoes Revisited* initiative from 2024.

I want to express my deep appreciation to our outstanding Executive Team, who so capably lead the charity on behalf of the Board, and to our directors, who generously contribute their time and expertise. A particular thanks goes to Nick Roberts and Sir Nick Pope, who stepped down from the Board this year after six and three years respectively. Their wisdom, humour, and dedication will be greatly missed.

Finally, as we look to the future, we do so with a strong strategy and a dedicated team. However, the Board and I remain acutely aware that global events can shape the needs of our community in ways that are swift and unexpected. We are committed to staying agile and

forward-thinking, ready to respond to the evolving challenges faced by Service personnel and their families during transition.

May I wish you all well in 2025.

Jim Macleod CB CVO, Chair



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