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Wales Manifesto 2021

Supporting those who've served

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About the Royal British Legion

The Royal British Legion is at the heart of a national network that supports serving members of the Armed Forces, ex-serving personnel and their families, ensuring their unique contribution is never forgotten.

We are the country's largest Armed Forces charity, with 217,000 members, 120,000 volunteers and a network of partners and charities who help us give support wherever and whenever it's needed. We've been here since 1921 and we'll be here as long as they need us.

We provide lifelong support to our serving and ex-serving personnel and their families.

We support them with:

- Physical and Mental Wellbeing
- Financial and Employment Support
- Care and Independent Living
- Local Community Connections
- Expert Guidance

The Legion also works with politicians and officials at all levels to bring the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant to life, and to further the interests of the Armed Forces community.

Through our research and campaigning, we seek to inform welfare service providers and challenge myths about the Armed Forces community. We also raise the profile of issues affecting serving and ex-serving personnel and their families and seek to improve government policy.

For more information contact us at: www.britishlegion.org.uk or call **0808 802 8080**

For further information on this document please email: publicaffairs@britishlegion.org.uk

A larger print version of this document is available on request.



Foreword Charles Byrne Director General, The Royal British Legion

This year The Royal British Legion will mark its centenary. In those 100 years, the treatment of serving men and women, veterans and their families has come a long way. Today, the vast majority of service leavers are happy, healthy, in gainful employment and making a positive contribution to our local communities. However, there are still those in need of support, and the Legion will be there for them for as long as they need us.

Since the Legion successfully campaigned for the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant to be enshrined in legislation, we have seen progress at UK, devolved and local government levels in ensuring the principles of 'No disadvantage due to Service compared to other citizens' and 'Special consideration for those who have given the most' are upheld. However, there is more work to do to ensure that progress continues.

We asked the Armed Forces community in Wales what needs to change to improve things and this manifesto is the result. We are calling on all candidates and parties at the Senedd elections to work with us to continue delivering for the Armed Forces community in Wales.

Thank you for your support.

Charles Byrne
Director General,
The Royal British Legion



Foreword Ant Metcalfe Area Manager, Wales

The people of Wales show incredible support for the Armed Forces community. Never has that been more evident than in 2020. The year was an enormous challenge for so many, yet the public still supported the virtual VE and VJ Day 75 commemorations, as well as our annual Poppy Appeal. We are so grateful for your continued support.

The Legion is at the heart of a national network that supports the Armed Forces community, and they have been at the centre of this manifesto's development. To deliver it, we have listened to the views of other charities, members of the Legion, our own welfare staff, and the people we support. The result is six recommendations for the next Welsh Government and the Senedd to consider.

Covid-19 is very understandably taking up a lot of the Welsh Government's focus right now. However, there are issues that our veterans faced

before the pandemic, some of which have been exacerbated by it. This manifesto contains recommendations that we believe could address the challenges in these policy areas.

We are grateful for the support that Members of the Senedd from across the political spectrum have given us and our Armed Forces community in the past, and we look forward to working with you in the future.

Thank you.

Ant Metcalfe
Area Manager,
Wales



Summary of Recommendations

Our Manifesto calls on the next Welsh Government to:

- Work with the Ministry of Defence to provide resettlement centre services in Wales to ensure improved transition into civilian life.
- Ensure that injured veterans can consistently access chronic pain treatment when they need it, where they need it, and in a manner that works for them.
- Commit to permanently fund the Supporting Service Children in Education Wales Fund and continue investment in the SSCE Cymru Project to ensure Service children have the best possible start.
- Expand and accelerate the roll out of guaranteed interviews for Armed Forces Service Leavers, Reservists and spouses who meet the minimum criteria for public sector jobs in Wales.
- Extend Housing Priority Need to cover 5 years post leaving military service and ensure divorced or separated spouses and partners of Service personnel in Wales can access housing support on the same terms as other Armed Forces families.
- Update the 'Veterans Substance Misuse Treatment Framework' and deliver better support to veterans with substance abuse issues.

Work with the Ministry of Defence to provide resettlement centre services in Wales to ensure improved transition into civilian life.

A well-managed transition can make an enormous difference to the future prospects of individuals leaving the Armed Forces. Veterans in Wales have told us that getting this right is important and there is considerable research highlighting the need to support those moving from the military to the civilian world.

The UK Government's Career Transition Partnership (CTP) provides support for Service personnel leaving the Armed Forces at "Resettlement Centres". These centres offer training sessions for a wide range of careers, CV writing support and interview practice. They are popular with the people the Legion supports and it is estimated that 86% of Service leavers who used the CTP in 2018/19 were employed within six months of leaving the Armed Forces¹.

The CTP operate resettlement centres in England, Northern Ireland and Germany. Unfortunately, veterans tell us they are difficult to access for those based in Wales.

As the map shows, military personnel in transition in Wales must travel large distances to attend resettlement courses, which has proven prohibitive for many of the veterans with whom we have engaged. For South Wales, Tidworth is nearly 100 miles from Cardiff, and for North Wales, Cottesmore is over 200 miles from Anglesey.

Resettlement centre services in Wales would have a positive impact on those transitioning into civilian life here. Previously, there have been satellite and pop-up resettlement centres in Wales but that practice stopped over ten years ago. We would welcome the Welsh Government and MOD working together to offer these services again in Wales.

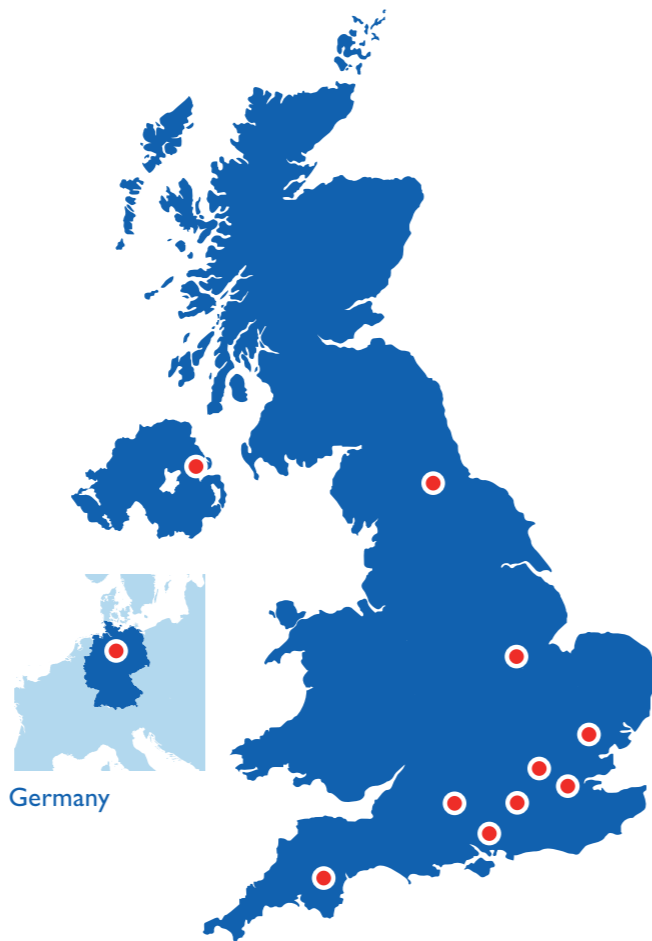


Figure1: Resettlement Centre Locations



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Julianne Williams
RAF veteran and Regional
Employment Advisor
Wales – RFEA



"On leaving the RAF in 2007, I attended a 'Pop up' Career Transition Workshop (CTW) at RAF St Athan. Being able to have my CTW at my nearest Welsh unit helped massively during the unsettling time of leaving the only career I had ever known.

Now, as the Regional Employment Advisor for Wales with RFEA – The Forces Employment Charity, I would welcome an opportunity for this to be afforded to every Welsh Service leaver choosing to settle and work in Wales. Regardless of where they have served in the country, local and regional transitional support and information is absolutely

pivotal for a successful and smooth transition into civilian life. I am often asked by clients why there isn't a resettlement centre in Wales.

The proposal to pilot resettlement centre services on a supply and demand basis would add so much value to local Service leavers and veterans and is one I wholeheartedly support."

Julianne Williams
RAF veteran and Regional Employment Advisor
Wales – RFEA

Ensure that injured veterans can consistently access chronic pain treatment when they need it, where they need it, and in a manner that works for them.

Pain from long-term conditions can have a particularly debilitating impact on an individual's psychological health and well-being. Musculoskeletal problems are the most common reason for medical discharge from the Armed Forces. For many, these problems are chronic and resistant to treatment, commonly leaving veterans with severe injuries living with persistent pain².

The Legion works closely with Blesma, the limbless veterans' charity, who have reported concerns about the disparity in persistent pain treatment in Wales. They have had to resort to paying for some of their members in Wales to travel to King Edward VII Hospital in London to attend their specialist Veterans' Pain Clinic.

Blesma reports that patients in Cardiff and Swansea are offered an adequate service, but outside the M4 corridor, high quality pain treatments are not where they need to be. Veterans we have engaged with report that waiting times are too long and the treatments available are not as up to date as those for veterans living in England. They also feel that pain clinicians would benefit from training in meeting veterans' specific needs, in order to promote their understanding, engagement and successful treatment.

Consideration should also be given to the delivery of remote therapies, where clinically appropriate for pain treatments, to potentially deliver more services to patients in locations that suit them. We urge the next Welsh Government to do all it can to improve pain treatments for veterans in Wales.



Mark Barton

47 year old veteran leg amputee with Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease, and chronic fatigue.



"In Powys we don't have any major hospitals of our own and the first time I needed a hospital appointment in Wales I was sent to see a Neurologist at a County Hospital in Hereford. My first thought was whether I could actually drive that far and back. I was diagnosed with Charcot-Marie-Tooth Disease (a progressive nerve condition that affects the feet, legs and hands) and found out that my Neurologist was actually on loan from Birmingham. He understood my pain...but soon the pain became all-consuming for me and was uncontrollable, causing chronic fatigue. I asked my GP in Wales to refer me to a pain specialist but had to wait until I'd had 3 operations and first saw someone from NHS England. Eventually I managed to see a pain Consultant through NHS Wales who gave me strong opiates, steroids and Lidocaine injections but then announced she was leaving her job.

I'm now due to have a 2nd leg amputation through the RJAH Hospital in Oswestry (England). Access to better quality pain treatments and a regular clinic, especially a clinic specifically for veterans here in Wales that could support me through my life, would be hugely beneficial. I have many people who support me now, including the Limb Centre team in Cardiff, numerous agencies and charities, including 'Blesma, The Limbless Veterans', and my friends and family. I can only hope though that my journey will improve, my pain will become more manageable and that I can continue to care for, and be with, the family who love me."

Mark Barton
Llandrindod Wells

Commit to permanently fund the Supporting Service Children in Education Wales Fund and continue investment in the SSCE Cymru Project to ensure Service children have the best possible start.

The lives of Service children can be more stressful than those of their civilian peers. The high mobility that can come with a military career can be destabilising for all the family, especially the children, who can experience frequent school moves.

Not all Service children find it challenging and there are huge positives that come with the lifestyle, but regular moves can make it difficult to settle in school, to make new friends, and to have access to a consistent curriculum.

Service children can understandably also be affected by the deployment of a parent, whether on an operational tour, training or postings abroad. It is in these times that their anxiety peaks and a heavy emotional toll can fall upon Service children. Prolonged periods of separation from a parent is an upsetting experience in itself, but add to that the knowledge that a parent may be in harm's way while on deployment and the emotional strain on Service children at such times can be severe.

In the absence of a Welsh Service Pupil Premium, the Legion has welcomed the 'Supporting Service Children in Education Wales Fund', which the Welsh Government introduced in 2018 and has since renewed twice. It provides £250,000

per year in grants to schools in Wales with Service children, which have been used in innovative ways to support these pupils. For example, grants have variably been used to fund staff who specifically help Service children; to purchase IT equipment that enables children to communicate with deployed parents; and even to build special gardens in school grounds to help children relax and reflect.

The fact that the Fund has been renewed twice is both welcome and a positive endorsement of the value it offers to Service children. However, the Legion would like to see this funding made permanent. The fixed term nature of the funding restricts schools from being able to commit to providing sustainable and long term support for the Service children as they move through their school career, since they cannot guarantee that posts or initiatives will be funded from one year to the next.

The Legion would also like to commend the work of Supporting Service Children in Education Cymru (SSCE Cymru), which has been instrumental in improving our collective understanding of Service children in Wales, and central to ongoing efforts to identify and support them in our schools. We hope the next Welsh Government will continue to invest in this programme.



James Voros Deputy Headteacher, Prendergast Community School.



"Prendergast CP School is a primary school in Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire. We have 415 pupils on roll, and the population of learners from Service backgrounds can vary between 10% and 20% of the school population, depending on the circumstances of the local Signals Regiment at Brawdy.

The school has benefited enormously from both funding and the activities facilitated by SSCE Cymru since its inception. For example, the school was successful in bidding for funding to support the employment of an "MOD Keyworker", who supports both the emotional needs and learning needs of those from a Service background. They liaise with Service families and with the local base, further strengthening and fostering relationships and ensuring that these learners are able to get a secure start to their learning in Pembrokeshire, or in the UK.

Networking events have allowed the school to share its own practice with others across Wales. The events have also allowed the school to take best

practice from others and include it in their own work. The events had previously been in person at a range of locations across Wales, allowing a wider range of schools to access events, and most recently online. These events have also opened opportunities for other grants and funding streams to support this group of learners.

The impact of this funding and networking includes:

- Successfully including all Service children, regardless of ability or personal circumstance, meaning no formal exclusions over the last three years
- That all Service children have made at least expected progress, if not more, over their time at the school
- Children and families feel welcomed into the school population."

James Voros,
Deputy Headteacher,
Prendergast Community School

Expand and accelerate the roll out of guaranteed interviews for Armed Forces Service Leavers, Reservists and spouses who meet the minimum criteria for public sector jobs in Wales.

Finding sustainable and appropriate employment after leaving Service is absolutely crucial. The majority of working age veterans go on to have diverse and successful careers after leaving the Armed Forces. However, this is not the case for all UK Service leavers. The 2016 Legion report "Deployment to Employment"³ set out to examine the employment rates of veterans in more detail and identify the barriers veterans may face in the civilian jobs market. Whilst more recent data shows the employment gap between veterans and the general population shrinking, previous Legion research has found that working age veterans in the UK are nearly twice as likely to be unemployed as their civilian contemporaries. There is also evidence of underemployment amongst the veteran population with veterans less likely than the general population to say that they feel able to use their skills and experience in their current role⁴.

We often see that the skills and experience outlined in veterans' job applications and CVs can be hard for civilian employers with little understanding of the military to fully appreciate or translate into a civilian context. It is not until interview that veterans are able to fully demonstrate the transferability of their skills and experience, and their relevancy to the role. Partners of Service personnel are frequently required to change location, which can also have a dramatic impact on their career.

Armed Forces Liaison Officers (AFLOs) were introduced in Wales in 2018. Since then, we have seen improved commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant and greater sharing of best practice amongst Welsh local authorities. We therefore welcomed the news in 2020 that the Welsh Government was to fund the AFLO posts for a further two years. One example of best practice introduced since AFLOs have been in post concerns guaranteed interviews for veterans who meet the minimum criteria for vacancies in local authorities, which has now been taken up by many councils across Wales, including Flintshire, Bridgend and Caerphilly.

A guaranteed interview scheme is also being piloted by the UK government for some civil service roles and in Wales, the Welsh Government has launched the "Making the Civil Service a Great Place to Work for Veterans" initiative, which includes a guarantee that for civil service jobs, "veterans who meet the minimum criteria for a role will progress to the next stage of selection".

We would like to see this work accelerated and for Welsh Government to work with AFLOs, local authorities and the civil service to ensure that veterans have the best possible opportunity to offer their extensive skills to the Welsh public sector.



Lisa Rawlings
Armed Forces Liaison
Officer for Gwent.



"As a veteran myself, I understand that sometimes a service leaver's CV may not be a full reflection of the skills they have learned in their time in the Armed Forces. Guaranteed interviews are a great way of getting a veteran's foot in the door to show those skills.

I am proud to say 4 out of the 5 Gwent Local Authorities (LA) have now implemented Guaranteed Interview Schemes for Armed Forces Service Leavers, Reservists, veterans and spouses if they

meet the vacancy essential criteria. The fifth has agreed in principle and will hopefully implement soon.

The way we went about it was to discuss with each Local Authority's HR teams, liaise with the Career Transition Partnership (CTP), write a report for each Cabinet for approval and then once approved, implement it with the council whilst advocating to other businesses/organisations.

It would be great if guaranteed interviews were more widespread in Wales so that Service Leavers can continue to show the positive impact they can have on an organisation."

Lisa Rawlings,
Armed Forces Liaison Officer for Gwent



Extend Housing Priority Need to cover 5 years post leaving military service and ensure divorced or separated spouses and partners of Service personnel in Wales can access housing support on the same terms as other Armed Forces families.

Most veterans find safe, secure accommodation after they leave the Armed Forces. However, the Legion's Household Survey in 2014⁵ found that 6% of those who had been discharged from the Armed Forces in the past five years experienced some difficulty in applying for council or housing association accommodation. We also know that there are unfortunately a small minority who can find themselves homeless, either on the street or 'sofa surfing' between friends and family.

Under the 2014 Housing (Wales) Act, if a Service person is 56 days away from discharge without accommodation, a local authority has a duty to help them find suitable accommodation. This accommodation can be in either the private or rental sector and must be expected to last at least six months. People homeless on leaving the Regular Armed Forces are classed as being in priority need.

Yet those who rely on the generosity of comrades and family may take time to seek formal homelessness support, with research historically showing veterans sleeping rough to be older than the general rough sleeper population. For those who take time to adjust to civilian life, or who may present for formal help seeking later in their transition, we recommend the Welsh Government also extend Priority Need so it encompasses not just those that are leaving the Armed Forces but those who left up to five years ago as well, to allow for adjustment into civilian life.

Separated Spouses

The principles of the Armed Forces Covenant apply to the whole Armed Forces community and this includes the families of serving and ex-Service personnel. Too often they can be overlooked in discussions on the treatment of our Armed Forces. They make great sacrifices and provide invaluable support, enabling our serving personnel to thrive in their military career. In many cases it is the spouses, partners and children of serving personnel who face some of the greatest upheavals associated with Armed Forces life. This can include being required to move house, school or job multiple times. It is vital that this significant contribution is recognised in national and local policies to ensure that they do not face disadvantage.

Ordinarily, applicants to social housing must demonstrate a local connection to the local authority area in which they are applying, usually through a prior period of residency or employment in the council area. However, there is an exemption to the local connection requirement in the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 for specified members of the Armed Forces community. Unfortunately this does not currently include separated partners, whose past sacrifices and support is forgotten when it comes to accessing housing. We would therefore like to see the local connection exemption apply to divorced and separated spouses, partners and children of Armed Forces personnel too. This now applies in England, so in comparison families in Wales are currently at a disadvantage when accessing housing.



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Royal British Legion's Housing Best Practice Guide.



Crown copyright, 2014

In 2019 the Royal British Legion produced a Best Practice Guide called 'Supporting the Armed Forces Community with Housing in Wales'. This brought together the best examples of how national and local governments were supporting Service Leavers in Wales.

The Legion is proud to operate in communities across the country, working with national and devolved governments, local authorities, and

housing associations to build the local partnerships and pathways that will reduce homelessness and other housing issues among the Armed Forces community.

Although homelessness and rough sleeping is not as high among the veteran population as many people might think, some veterans still find it difficult to source suitable accommodation after leaving HM Armed Forces. Housing is consistently one of the top three reasons for people to contact Veterans' Gateway.

The issues veterans face finding appropriate housing cannot be fixed with a silver bullet, or indeed by a single government, we need to work together to tackle these problems and that is what our guide aims to do.

The best practice guide can be viewed and downloaded in English and Welsh via: www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/things-to-do/campaigns-policy-and-research/best-practice-guides/housing-support



Update the ‘Veterans Substance Misuse Treatment Framework’ and deliver better support to veterans with substance abuse issues.

The vast majority of veterans in Wales do not face substance misuse issues. However, MOD research into alcohol rates in Service, released in 2017, showed that of the over 100,000 Service personnel surveyed, 61% scored 5 or more on the AUDIT-C scale, placing them at increased risk of, or already experiencing, alcohol-related harm.

A 2020 report by King’s College London and the University of Liverpool showed that recognition of alcohol misuse problems and help-seeking for alcohol problems among serving and ex-Service personnel is low, with approximately half of those who met the criteria for alcohol misuse recognising they had an alcohol problem⁶. A study by Combat Stress in 2016 also found that veterans are more likely to be admitted to hospital with physical health problems prior to being diagnosed with an alcohol issue, citing pride as a possible reason for not seeking help earlier⁷.

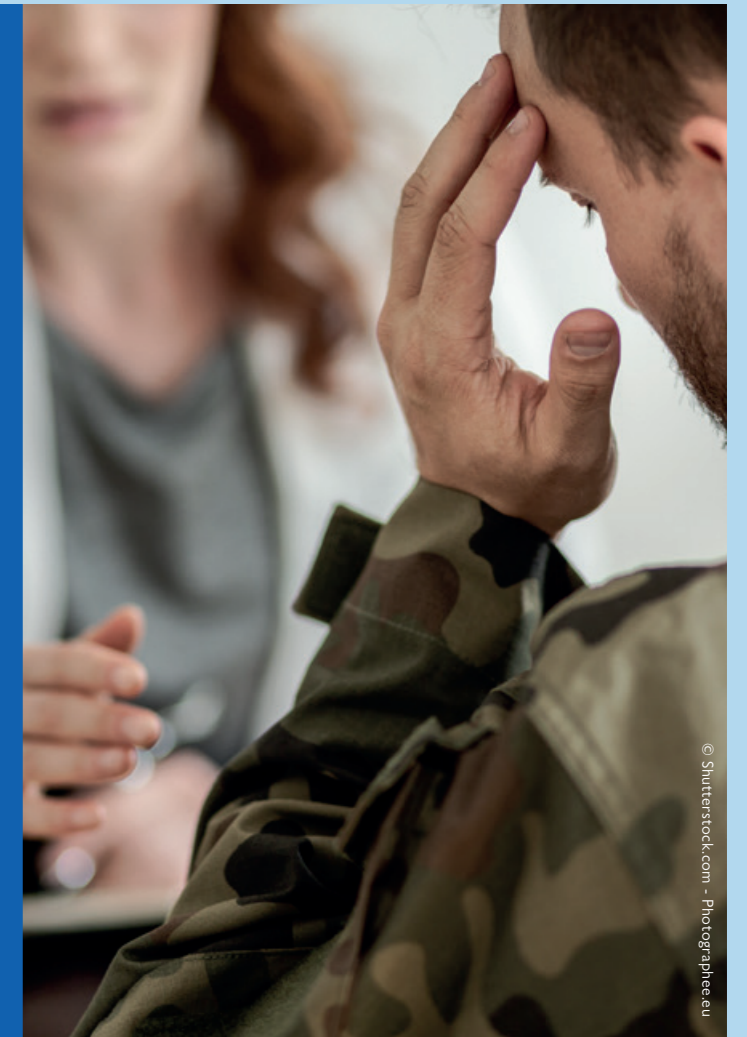
It is important that we get substance misuse treatment for our veterans right. In 2014, the Welsh Government introduced the *Veterans Substance Misuse Treatment Framework*⁸. This provided a pathway for veterans to receive treatment for substance misuse issues. The Legion believe it is time to update this framework. In our experience, Drug and Alcohol Services and Welsh NHS Services may not always work together as effectively as they could, with some veterans slipping through the net as a result.

For example, when a veteran is referred into Veterans NHS Wales and one of their main presenting problems is substance misuse, before any treatment can start the substance misuse needs to be addressed, so the veteran is referred to a Drug and Alcohol Service (D&A). However, those D&A services sometimes do not understand veteran-specific issues and so the veteran may quickly drop out. In these cases, we are finding that far too frequently D&A services do not contact the referring agency to tell them the veteran has ceased attending, leaving the veteran without any treatment for the condition they sought help for in the first place.

The Royal British Legion funds a pilot scheme with the Bristol Drugs Project⁹. The aim of the project is to improve access to and engagement with treatment services for veterans. A ‘Veteran Case Worker’ liaises with all agencies involved with the support of veterans locally and is able to work with veterans, including those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, in a flexible way. The caseworker also delivers brief and extended interventions as part of the engagement process and completes full assessments for longer term treatment with Bristol’s Recovery Orientated Alcohol and Drug Service (ROADS), where appropriate. The results of this pilot have been very positive.



Leigh in South Wales Bosnia and Afghanistan Army veteran.



“I was an Army Brat. I joined the same regiment as my Dad the year he left the Forces. I toured in Bosnia and Afghanistan. Drinking was part of the culture in my regiment, it was what you did at the end of a hard day, hard week, hard tour.

When I left the Forces in 2005, things were OK. I had a council house in Newport, I had steady work. But after a couple of years things started to go wrong. We lost the council house, my children went to the south coast, my drinking deteriorated, and I ended up in prison.

Us squaddies can be very stubborn and proud and would rather suffer in silence than ask for help.

I always tried to manage my drinking myself, and thankfully I now have it under control. However, if people like me had better access to specific support and support groups, I feel it would have made a big difference to the problems I faced.

I have faced issues in accessing services in England and Wales and I must say it has been better in Wales. However, I hope we can improve the way we support the veteran community, especially on issues like housing and substance misuse.”

Leigh in South Wales
Army veteran

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