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Cultural Awareness of the Veteran Context

A training exercise for the public sector

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Please complete this digital workbook
as part of a raising awareness exercise,
if you would like further information
please contact
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This booklet is aimed at people working in public sector roles, in particular, roles which are public facing. This is because you may often come into contact with veterans without even realising it.

It is important and helpful to have knowledge and awareness of military culture to be best equipped to serve this population to successfully reintegrate into the civilian community.

This work-booklet gives information and advice whilst bringing to your attention the cultural differences between military and civilian life to question how this may be relevant to your role.

If you have any further questions, please contact

veterans@glyndwr.ac.uk

WHAT DO YOU ALREADY KNOW ABOUT...

The Armed Forces Community in North Wales

The Armed Forces Covenant

Military Culture

WHAT IS A VETERAN?

Definition

In the UK a veteran is defined as ‘any person who has performed paid military service for at least one day’

This applies to all of the tri-services (Air force, Navy and Army) and people who have served in the Reserves.

The circumstances in which someone exits the military is not of relevance to veteran status.

The veteran population

Approximately 15,000 people leave the UK Armed Forces each year (Forces in Mind Trust, 2017) and in 2014, the Royal British Legion (RBL) estimated the size of the UK veteran population at 2.8 million (RBL, 2014). This means that over 5% of the UK population are veterans.

The number of veterans in North Wales is about 51,000, around 9% of the population, aged over 16 years, however these figures are an estimation (Atenstaedt, 2016). This proportion of veterans in North Wales is suggested to be due to higher levels of recruitment in Wales compared to the rest of the UK (Tannock, Burgess & Moles, 2013).

Why is this important?

Education about the veteran context is important to help us fulfil our jobs properly and to be able to demonstrate our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant .

The Armed Forces Covenant is an agreement (or a covenant) between the People of the United Kingdom (me and you) Her Majesty’s Government and all those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces and this includes members of their family.

The Covenant:

“Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.”

As each individual is part of this agreement it is important that training is undertaken to understand the military context and how this could make aspects of civilian life challenging to those who have served in the forces.

This booklet will provide you with insight into the military culture and will share the findings of a study recently completed in North Wales, which explored the transition experiences of veterans. The findings from this research is in-tended to help civilians gain an understanding of cultural differences between the military and civilian life and consequently explain a need for sensitivity when working with veterans.

The Military Culture

Research conducted in both the UK and USA reports that when serving in the armed forces, people form a military identity. This identity is often described as 'becoming a warrior' which would be needed for successful military performance.

Military identity is consistently reinforced through the military culture. Veterans often describe military culture in terms of stoicism, self-reliance, and prioritizing the needs of the unit over the needs of the individual. Ex-armed forces personnel also often see the people they served with as an-other family and talk about the strong bonds they had.

Being good at your job is part of the military identity and being competent in what you do is seen as a source of self respect.

The intensity of experience associated with living within the military community would make it unsurprising if difficulties arose after leaving, the strong cultural identity developed serves to emphasise the differences between military life and civilian life.

Consequently veterans often describe a sense of loss upon leaving the armed forces and describe being 'stuck' between two identities, where they are no longer serving personnel, but don't know if they are a civilian either.

Leaving the Armed Forces and living in North Wales

Although there is a high proportion of veterans living in North Wales, it was recognised that little was known about the needs of the veteran population.

Researchers at Glyndwr University, funded by Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT), have completed a two year study exploring everyday decision making of veterans when they transition from the Armed Forces to the civilian community.

This study began with the premise that the majority of veterans make a successful transition, however the drastic change of culture from the military to 'civvy street' requires veterans to work hard to 'fit in' to a community outside the military.

Research Aims:

To explore how veterans work to be themselves in the civilian community

To prioritise the resources and capabilities veterans identify as essential for transition

Methods:

Stage one consisted of interviews with veterans and stage two was an online survey to prioritise what they saw as important and accessible resources and capabilities.

THE MILITARY PERSPECTIVE

From our interviews with veterans the strength of the 'military perspective' was clear. The military perspective is an enduring and influential way an ex-Military person views situations. We attempt to explain this perspective as follows:

1. **'Its drilled into you'** - this represents how identity and cultural behavior within the military is reinforced, for example, respect of authority, following orders according to a rigid chain of command and the structured routines expected of each person is understood by all.
2. **'Mission command'** - this refers to a process of decision making used to reduce uncertainty and maintain safety through making sure everyone is reliable when expected to do what is required.
3. **'We have each others back'** - this explains the close bonds between people who work together in the Military. The intimacy and proximity in which they live means relationships are built that are often compared to those within a close family.

Once people leave the Armed Forces, this military perspective can be a challenge for civilians to relate to because it is very different to the way the ordinary person would see things.

The military perspective is unique to people who have experienced it and therefore in order to 'become a civilian' certain tensions in everyday decision making can occur.

Transition: Becoming a Civilian

The transition to become a civilian was explained through these 5 tensions in everyday decision making:

1. **'Moving forward'** - in the military career progression was well defined and people knew what was expected of them to get promoted. However 'moving guage, qualifications and employer expectations.
2. **'Changing of pace'** - managing time, making friends and being free to prioritise what matters, is a challenge after having such a structured approach to every day life in the military.
3. **'Putting down roots'** - veterans are, because of the nature of their work, familiar with moving around, a lot! Staying in one place, building a home and keeping a family with all its expectations upon transition, although often desired, can be a cause for tension while trying to combat 'itchy feet'.
4. **'Living the moment'** - the military culture and precise skills anticipated of being an expert in their field is often described as a demonstration of an unconscious performance that gives them a sense of worth which is difficult to replicate in civilian life.
5. **'Being a veteran'** - the identity of being a veteran can be difficult to contemplate. Although no longer a member of the Military there is often reluctance to be labelled as a civilian, however, the title veteran is not always accepted either.

RESOURCES

The second stage of the research, as mentioned previously, used a form of survey to establish what the priority resources would be for veterans in North Wales.

These findings have been shared with Local Authorities and policy-makers, however it is useful for us to understand the most important resources and capabilities the community should support when working with a veteran:

- To have confidence in their potential.
- To encourage ability to set achievable goals and not to beat themselves up if they don't get there
- To acknowledge the work required to endure frustrations and rejections, having emotional resilience
- To realise the importance they place on finding affordable housing in the area of work with good schools
- To understand the need for employment opportunities where their military skills could be translated as transferrable.

How can you in your role support veterans to achieve these capabilities and/or utilize these resources?

TOP TIPS

Now that you have learned about the military culture and how this is relevant to the North Wales context, you might be thinking, how can I put this into practice?

Here are some simple top-tips we have devised...

1. Show sensitivity and understanding. What you have learned now you might not have known yesterday and this could enable you to have an understanding of what could be challenging for a veteran.
2. Ask people if they are a veteran. Consider if the covenant is relevant and how could you meet a duty to ensure that they receive no disadvantage in services due to their time in the military.
3. Adapt your communication strategy. When speaking to people from an ex-armed forces background it brings to light some aspects of civilian identity and everyday life that might be unfamiliar to them. Therefore with the military culture in mind we can be flexible with how we communicate.
4. Exploit the positives that ex-armed forces personnel can bring to organizations rather than focusing on deficits or needs. The majority of ex-armed forces personnel make successful transitions.
5. Continue to learn about veteran service provisions and keep up to date with services in your community so you can provide relevant and consistent advice when required.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

1.
2.
3.

WHAT CAN BE PUT INTO PRACTICE?

1.
2.
3.

HELPFUL CONTACTS

Veterans Gateway: The First Point of Contact

Providing information on where to seek advice on housing, jobs, Finances.

www.veteransgateway.org.uk

The Royal British Legion

The Royal British Legion provides lifelong support for the Armed Forces community - serving men and women, veterans, and their families. **0808 802 8080**

SSAFA

The Armed Forces charity provides life-long support to veterans and their families.

List of emails for North Wales:

Anglesey@ssafa.org.uk

Gwynedd@ssafa.org.uk

Powys@ssafa.org.uk

Clwyd@ssafa.org.uk

Veterans NHS Wales

Each Local Health Board (LHB) has appointed an experienced clinician as a Veteran Therapist (VT) with an interest or experience of military mental health problems. The VT will accept referrals from health care staff, GPs, veteran charities and self-referrals from ex-service personnel. Veterans NHS Wales helps veterans with mental health problems and is the first port of call for therapy. **029 2074 2062**

Combat Stress

Combat Stress exists to support veterans of the British Armed Forces, and members of the Reserve Forces, through effective treatment and support for mental health problems.

Helpline: 0800 138 1619

Change Step

Change Step provides support, activities, comradeship and camaraderie for veterans and their families. **0300 777 2259**

ask@change-step.co.uk

Army Families Federation

The Army Families Federation (AFF) is the independent voice of Army families and works hard to improve the quality of life for Army families around the world. **0752 749 2868**

wales@aff.org.uk

Help for Heroes

Help for Heroes was founded in 2007 to provide direct, practical support for wounded, injured and sick Service Personnel, Veterans and their loved ones. **01980 844 280**

bandofbrothers@helpforheroes.org.uk / bandofsisters@helpforheroes.org.uk

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Quotes from veterans living in North Wales

"you get told when you've got to get up, you get told when you have breakfast, you're told what time you've got to go to work, you told when you've got physical training, and then you get told you've got lunch again....they'll say you're on duty tonight because someone's got sick.... you're always on duty"

"you've got to be able to trust that person is going to protect you as much as you will protect them... it is like a family"

"if you don't understand something that a 19 year old understands it's hard to go.... can you explain this to me it's just unthinkable, you would find ways around it"

"because you are kind of dragged around in the army, if you don't want to do something the chances are someone's making you do it ... you don't have any freedom and once you do have freedom you don't know what to do with it"

"It's like walking on egg shells you never know how far you can go until you start upsetting somebody, we 'have to conform to the social norms'.
But we had no social norms"

"we have had I think in 14 years up to that point we'd had 9 houses
I can put some roots down at long last for the kids"

"living for the moment, it's risk-taking when you're in an environment that's scares the bejesus out of you on a daily basis but your supported by your mates"

"it was like everyone had just turned their back on you... You feel like the rugs been pulled from under your feet you feel completely lost and helpless"



For further information
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email: n.lloydjones@glyndwr.ac.uk