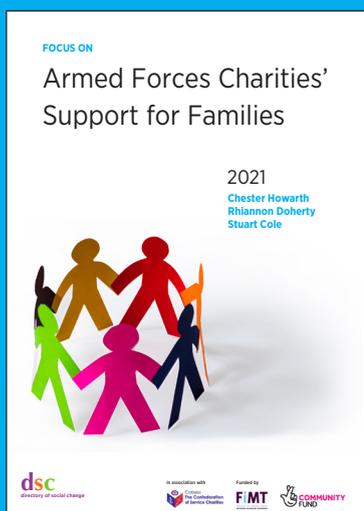


Armed Forces Charities' Support for Families

Families of serving and ex-Service personnel are a large and important part of the armed forces community. These families face similar challenges to families in the civilian population, for example in accessing good quality housing, securing stable employment, maintaining children's education, and sustaining positive family relationships.

However, there can be distinct 'stressors' for armed forces families (Walker et al., 2020). For example, living in Service Family Accommodation can present challenges for serving families, whilst being geographically mobile can affect eligibility for social housing for ex-Service families (Walker et al., 2020; Heaver et al., 2018).



Difficulties securing employment for spouses or partners can be exacerbated by being too far away from support networks to benefit from unpaid childcare or frequent moves leading to gaps in employment history or incomplete training (Lyonette et al., 2018; AFF, 2020a).

For children, moving school can create educational disruptions (Hall, 2019; Walker et al., 2020). Meanwhile, separation from the serving parent can result in confusion, worry, and changing responsibilities in the household (McConnell et al., 2019; Gribble and Fear, 2019; Children's Commissioner, 2018).

For the first time, this report provides a comprehensive overview of the armed forces charity sector's support for families.



Methodology

- DSC maintains a database containing information on approximately 1,800 armed forces charities.
- To identify charities which support families, researchers conducted keyword searches and then individually examined the annual accounts, websites, and charity regulator information of relevant charities.
- Data on charities in DSC's database was gathered from the Charity Commission for England and Wales (CCEW), Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR), the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI), and Cobseo (The Confederation of Service Charities).
- DSC conducted a survey which achieved responses from 25.7% (N=69) of armed forces charities identified as supporting families.

Key findings

Level of provision

In total, 268 charities were identified as supporting armed forces families. This comprises approximately 14.8% of all armed forces charities in the UK, as of July 2020.

During the year to July/August 2020, respondents to DSC's survey supported 89,000 beneficiaries (individual family members) and spent £68.5 million on providing this support. These figures are based on data for survey respondents with available data; the total for the 268 armed forces charities that support families is likely to be greater.



268

armed forces charities support families



89,000

beneficiaries access support per year



£68.5m

spent on financial support per year

Beneficiaries and types of support

Respondents to DSC's survey most commonly provide support to spouses and/or partners (69.6%), followed closely by children (66.7%), widows (60.9%) and adult dependants (43.5%). Almost half of the survey respondents (48.2%) provide some form of support to all four types of family member.

Overall, there are more charities providing support to families of ex-Service personnel (89.9%, N=62) than serving personnel (72.5%, N=50). In addition, whilst 62.3% (N=43) of the respondents support both serving and ex-Service families, there are almost three times more charities supporting ex-Service families exclusively.



44%

Support through social groups



42%

support with mental health



41%

support with education

Survey respondents' support for families was most commonly through social groups (43.5%, N=30), followed by mental health support (42.0%, N=29), education support (40.6%, N=28), and financial support (34.8%, N=24). Other areas included support with physical health, housing, employment, domestic violence, childcare, and criminal justice.

Collaboration, evaluation and challenges

In total, 71.0% of the survey respondents work in partnership with at least one other organisation and, on average, collaborated with four different types of organisation within and outside of the charity sector. The majority of respondents (65.2%) reported benefits from collaboration.

Over half (54.2%, N=32) of the respondents measure the impact of their services on armed forces families. However, smaller charities are less likely to measure impact than their larger counterparts.

A key challenge which emerged from charities' qualitative responses is identifying beneficiaries. Meanwhile, 69.6% (N=48) reported impacts of COVID-19, such as change in methods of service delivery, a drop in fundraising or donated income and having to pause some services.



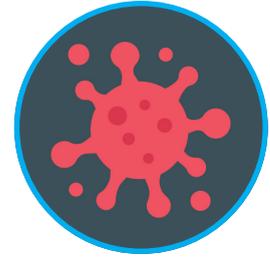
54%

measure the impact of support



37%

find identifying beneficiaries challenging



70%

experienced impacts of COVID-19

Conclusions and recommendations

This research identified a total of 268 armed forces charities that support families. These charities comprise approximately 14.8% of all armed forces charities in the UK. Survey respondents spend around £68.5 million to support around 89,000 individual family members per year; the figures for the 268 charities that support families is likely to be greater.

Furthering commitment and reducing barriers to measuring impact

Measuring impact is a key part of assessing and improving support. That just over half (54.2%) of respondents measure the impact of their services on armed forces families – and that smaller charities are less likely to do so – suggests considerable potential to further increase impact measurement.

More widespread and extensive impact measurement could improve charities' support and, ultimately, beneficiaries' outcomes. Whilst this should be further promoted among charities that deliver support to armed forces families as a whole, more collaborative work may be needed to enable small and micro charities with limited resources to share in the benefits.

Improving processes for identifying beneficiaries

Identifying beneficiaries was the most common challenge faced by charities. The sector should continue to work together to improve processes for charities to be approached directly by beneficiaries, to receive referrals from other organisations, and/or to search for beneficiaries themselves.

This could be achieved through ensuring the referrals of beneficiaries are timely and appropriate, making use of key tools such as the Map of Need (Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, 2020b) to aid in directing services, and undertaking further research to better understand beneficiaries' help-seeking behaviours and engage with them early before crisis situations arise.

About the report

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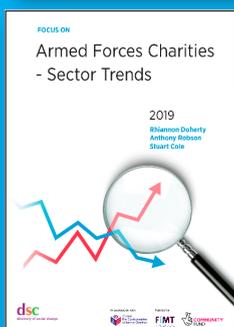
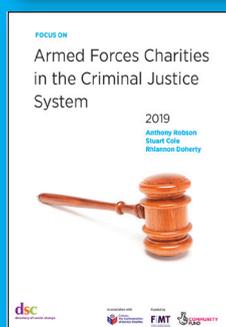
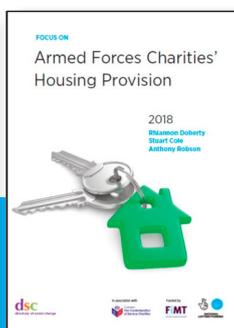
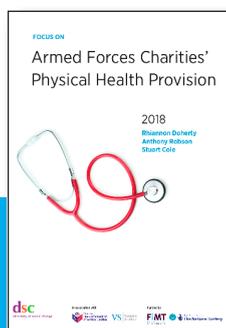
This publication is the seventh *Focus On* report, a series providing overviews of specific types of support within the armed forces charity sector.

The series follows on from DSC's three Sector Insight reports: *UK Armed Forces Charities* (2014), *Armed Forces Charities in Scotland* (2016), and *Armed Forces Charities* (2020).



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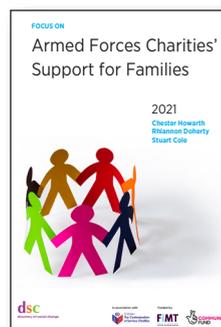


About DSC

The Directory of Social Change (DSC) has a vision of an independent voluntary sector at the heart of social change.

We help independent charities, voluntary organisations and community groups to achieve their goals by:

- Providing practical tools that organisations and activists need, including publications, training courses, conferences and research
- Acting as a 'concerned citizen' in public policy debates, leading campaigns and stimulating debate on key policy issues
- Carrying out research and providing information to influence policymakers



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