

envoy

SUMMER 2020

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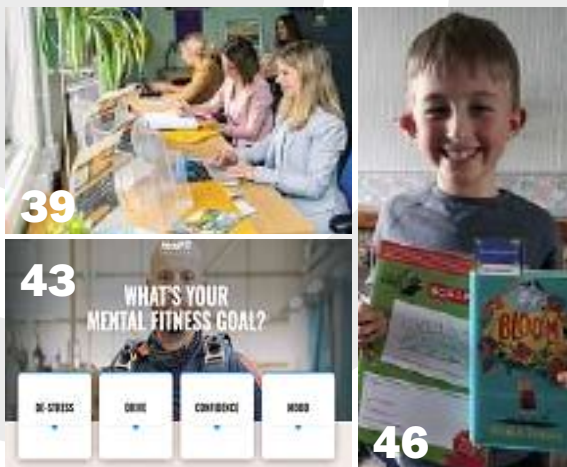
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In this the Summer edition I always like to add a spotlight on one of the RAF's display teams so that we can all feel connected and ready for the display season ahead. This year we have the Red Arrows and whilst their piece isn't necessarily about the much loved air shows, I hope you still enjoy indulging in a bit of a read about this amazing aerobatic team.

Our features section includes some very welcome RAF Programme HYDRO news, about the recovery of heating and hot water across the Air Estate - a mammoth task.

There are also many pieces around health and wellbeing. One is about a Facebook Group that's there purely for parents and run by the parents of those who serve. It is great to follow how everyone supports each other through what can be a significant period of change for family dynamics when sons and daughters head off on their initial training and beyond.

Finally... wherever we are on this COVID-19 path by the time you read this, I can say safely on behalf of the whole RAF FF team, that our thoughts and thanks go out to all those families whose lives have been affected by this unprecedented situation.

Please keep in touch. It's great to hear from you.



Caroline.

The Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team flying along New York's Hudson River, with Manhattan's cityscape as a backdrop during the Red Arrows' 11-week tour of Canada and the United States. Image by SAC Rose Buchanan. MoD/Crown Copyright 2019.

The RAF Families Federation is supported by the RAF Benevolent Fund

The RAF Families Federation is an independent organisation parented by the RAF Association



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rafbf.org
Registered charity number
England and Wales 1081009
Scotland SC038109

**ROYAL
AIR FORCES
Association**

The charity that supports the RAF family

rafa.org.uk
Registered charity number
England and Wales 226686
Scotland SC037673

CONTACT

Telephone: **01780 781650**
email: **enquiries@raf-ff.org.uk**
Website: **raf-ff.org.uk**

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Director: Maria Lyle

Office Manager: Ruth McClelland

Communications Manager:

Caroline Woodward

Communications Assistant: Nick Crouch

Web Content Officer: Jade Coe

Operations and Policy Manager:

Lisa Thipthorp

Policy Advisor (Health & Additional Needs):

Alison Cotton

Policy Advisor (Education & Childcare):

Louise Briggs

Evidence Manager: Richie Morgan

Evidence Assistant: Kenneth Wood

Evidence Assistant (Accommodation) job

share: Stan Brathwaite and Gregory Timlin



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email c.cappie@methodpublishing.co.uk

BFBS LAUNCHES 'FORCES VOICES' CREATIVITY COMPETITION

bfbs

Use your isolation inspirations to bag £500 worth of Amazon vouchers.



During this difficult time, we know that lots of people are getting creative at home to keep their spirits up or children entertained – but they may feel that all their hard efforts are going to waste as these masterpieces end up in a box or on their hard drive.

At BFBS we want to encourage people to share their lockdown creations through 'Forces Voices', a creativity competition that allows adults and children to either get creative from scratch or present pieces they've already made and want to share with the world.

The Competition

Each piece will be judged by an expert in one of the following categories: written word/audio, video, arts and crafts and photography. There will be a winning adult and child in each category, who will each receive £500 worth of Amazon vouchers.

Visit www.forcesvoices/competition to enter and find all the Ts and Cs. Closing date 8th June 2020.

If the prospect of winning £500 to spend on Amazon isn't enough, we want to celebrate all the isolation inspirations even further by showcasing all the entries on forces.net for everyone to enjoy.

The Judges

Arts & Crafts Category



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Video Category



**GUY
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Photography Category



**CPL REBECCA
BROWN**

Winner of the British Army
Photographer of the Year Award

Written Word/ Audio Category



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FROM THE **Director**

5
DIRECTOR

I write this during very strange times for us all. Every single person reading this will have been impacted by the huge changes that COVID-19 has brought - whether you have had to educate children at home, deliver essential services in your job, or have been challenged by sudden financial difficulties due to loss of work.

The RAF Family has many of us who face a range of obstacles now, as we are often operating away from wider family networks that might have otherwise been able to step in. Perhaps you have elderly relatives that you can't support directly due to where you live and work – or have been deployed in support of Operation Broadshare.

Please remember that if you have any questions or concerns, the RAF Families Federation team is here to support you

all in some turbulent times – and as we hopefully return to a more normal tempo, where there will undoubtedly be some longer term effects for us all.

Throughout this period the team has continued to work on projects that will deliver a lasting benefit to you – working closely with DIO to ensure the next contract for accommodation maintenance reflects your views, and helping to shape improved childcare support to name just two.

We don't know at time of writing if we will see any of you during the summer season of events at RAF Units – but we hope some of them may take place later in the year so we can meet as many of you in person as possible!

Best wishes,

Maria



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FOREWORD

By Air Vice-Marshal Maria Byford,
Chief of Staff Personnel and Air Secretary

I was delighted to be asked to write this foreword, and even more so as your new Chief of Staff Personnel and Air Secretary. When I took on the role at the end of February, I thought that I had some idea of what the forthcoming weeks and months would bring – how wrong was I! Most of that time has been spent isolated and then socially distanced from my team, but the work to support our people and their families has continued despite our ‘new normal’ of remote working and virtual meetings. This week I was delighted to meet up (through my iPad!) with the RAF Families Federation Director, Maria Lyle, and learn of the excellent work that the Federation is doing to support and promote the needs of all RAF personnel, including Reserves and ‘Singlies’, and their families.

We are all working together to meet the challenges posed by the global pandemic, with our people deployed or at readiness to respond to the Government’s requests for assistance, keeping safe by working from home where possible, and caring for others, including stepping into the role of teacher whilst the country’s schools remain closed. It is more important than ever to look out for our friends and neighbours who might be in need, and point them towards Station Welfare Teams, SSAFA and our RAF

charities who can all help. If you’re not sure, have a look at the websites for the RAF Families Federation (www.raf-ff.org.uk), RAF Benevolent Fund (www.rafbf.org) or RAF Association (www.rafa.org.uk) for valuable guidance and to be signposted to their services.

Now is also the time to be looking after yourself, as well as those you live alongside. The health and wellbeing of you and your family are precious, and I would encourage you to take advantage

of the generous support provided by our amazing RAF charities, including:

- The free RAF Benevolent Fund Listening and Counselling Service, which provides a confidential helpline and therapy sessions for people suffering emotional difficulties, and free access to the Headspace mindfulness app which is being extended to families.
- The free RAF Association Finding It Tough mental wellbeing training, which was launched across the UK in March, and will recommence once the current lockdown is sufficiently relaxed.

- The RAF Central Fund offer of 60 days free access to the Les Mills online workout programme, with access to a discounted rate thereafter.

As before, my team will be working closely with the Federation to deliver life and family friendly policies, and to improve the remunerative and non-remunerative support provided for our people. The picture gives you a flavour of what's on offer.

Till we meet again, look after yourselves and each other, keep well and stay safe!

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The Armed Forces purchase scheme is listed within the 'Need help to Move' section and you can find the nearest development to you through our '**search for a new home**'



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For a subscription of only 50p per month (direct from your pay), in the event of your death whilst serving in the RAF, an immediate grant of up to £17,500 is paid to your nominated beneficiary.

British forces overseas
posting: Cyprus update

A complete overview of Cyprus and its UK bases, a guide to the island and employment opportunities for civilian UK dependents.

Service leavers guide
updated

The service leavers guide offers information and advice on armed forces pensions, resettlement, reserve liability and support from charitable organisations prior to and after leaving regular service.

Served in the USA
with your family since
2010?

If you had children born there, they will have dual citizenship, and there is some important information you need to be aware of.

Armed Forces Covenant Fund
Trust set to offer additional
fundingARMED FORCES
COVENANT
FUND TRUST

The Chancellor announced on 11 March 2020 that the Government will provide an extra £10 million in 2020-21 to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, to support veterans by providing funding for projects.

Recovery of heating and
hot water across the Air
Estate

The Air Force Main Board has endorsed the immediate implementation of Programme HYDRO to target the recovery of heating and hot water (H&HW) across the Air Estate.

Who can access TILS?



The Ministry of Defence is exploring how it can provide armed forces personnel with more choice of housing and meet their aspirations for home ownership - updated information on GOV.UK.

BFBS Big Salute open for
2020 Grant Applications

Forces charities can now apply for project-based grants from BFBS' annual Big Salute campaign. Big Salute grants are awarded up to the value of £10k per charity so the funds can make a huge difference.

Sue Holderness backs
Battle of Britain
competition

The RAF Benevolent Fund has launched a new competition inviting the public to write a script telling a fictional story based on the Battle of Britain, in which Royal Air Force pilots bravely fought in the skies.

Tri-service regulations for
expenses and allowances
(JSP 752) UPDATED

JSP 752 is the policy document for expenses and allowances for regular and reserve UK armed forces personnel (updated 2 April 2020).

Veterans' Factsheet



Document with key facts and data about military veterans in the UK focussing on employment, health, housing and the justice system from the Office for Veterans' Affairs.

RAF Apprenticeships
celebrates its centenary

In 1920, the first entry of RAF Aircraft Apprentices arrived at RAF Cranwell to start on what was then a very innovative three-year scheme of technical training.

SSAFA expands their
mentoring service
UK-wide

The Armed Forces charity is rolling out their Mentoring Service to all members of the Armed Forces to assist with their transition period, after mentees reported a 35% reduction in isolation.

Military Misconceptions



Two thirds of adults have been put off joining the military amid fears they will suffer PTSD, struggle to get a job or get a home when they leave.

Military veterans are to be
guaranteed interviews for
civil service jobs

The initiative, launched by the Office for Veterans' Affairs in the Cabinet Office will boost the employment prospects of those who have served in the British Armed Forces.

RED ARROWS SHOWCASE BEST OF BRITISH ACROSS NORTH AMERICA

USING a trademark combination of close, formation flying and dynamic loops and rolls, the Red Arrows have been entertaining and enthralling people since 1965.

While many will associate only the UK's summer months with seeing the Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team in the air, its activity is a year-round operation that has global reach.

The comprehensive planning, tireless training and detailed preparation for the next campaign begins almost as soon as the team's famous Hawk fast-jets land from the last airshow of the season.

This is even the case after a gruelling, history-making overseas deployment.

Indeed, when the Red Arrows returned from a hugely-successful, 11-week tour of North America in October, the work-up training for 2020 got underway just days later.

However, the global COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly means this year's airshow calendar looks very different, as event organisers have been left with no option but to postpone or cancel.

Whatever the eventual look and feel of the Red Arrows' 56th display season, the exposure gained through the 2019 tour to Canada and the United States means the team's never been so visible.

It was the first time in more than a decade that the team – which aims to represent the UK and showcase the RAF – had visited the continent.

The activity continued a long-standing record of the Red Arrows supporting the Government's GREAT Britain Campaign, helping to highlight opportunities across business, education and tourism.





But the latest tour was the largest-ever and an indication of the UK's continuing commitment to enduring relationships, mutual prosperity and extensive security cooperation in North America.

So ambitious was the deployment, the Red Arrows performed coast-to-coast, with tens of millions of people seeing dynamic, colourful displays and precision flypasts at locations including the majestic Niagara Falls, California's golden beaches and New York's Hudson River.

Squadron Leader Martin Pert, Red 1 and Team Leader, said: "This was a tour of epic proportions and challenges – we took Red Arrows aircraft further west than ever before and completed a schedule of events, both in the air and

on the ground, that both tested us but proved how capable this entire team is."

A dozen of the team's Hawk T1As departed RAF Scampton on August 5, while more than 80 personnel and 12 tonnes of freight and equipment were flown in two Voyager aircraft and a pair of A400M Atlas transporters.

Together, these aircraft were crucial in getting the Red Arrows' single-engine jets safely to North America.

Without the means to refuel in the air and not possessing the range to make the transatlantic crossing in one sortie, the fast-jets were flown, over three days, via stops in Scotland, Iceland, Greenland and Goose Bay to reach Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The Red Arrows' jets were split into two sections to make the crossing and each location had a team of engineers and support staff pre-positioned by the transport fleet.

A Challenger aircraft from the Royal Danish Air Force provided search-and-rescue cover, representing close-cooperation from a NATO partner.

Sqn Ldr Pert said: "We arrived on time at Halifax International, with a big media and civic delegation watching – a fantastic achievement and a credit to all involved, right across the entire Whole Force."

Once in North America, the tempo of activity was incredibly high.



There were 21 displays and 30 stunning flypasts completed over major landmarks or locations, ranging from a baseball stadium in Washington DC to a mixed formation with the Canadian Forces' Snowbirds team over Toronto.

Among the largest events was the Great Pacific Airshow in Huntington Beach, California, where three million people watched.

A 19-aircraft flight down New York's Hudson River was another significant moment.

Trailing signature red, white and blue trails over the Big Apple, the Red Arrows flew with the F-16s of the US Air Force Thunderbirds, two F-35 Lightning IIs and a pair of F-22 Raptors.

Sqn Ldr Pert said: "What made that day in New York even more impressive was what happened after the flight –

demonstrating the tour's ambitions and remit to influence and inspire.

"Just minutes after landing from this complex sortie, the pilots were driven into central Manhattan to carry out a wide-ranging six-hour engagement programme, finishing with the Red Arrows and the GREAT Britain campaign branding being displayed in Times Square.

"It was typical of the carefully-choreographed and potent combination of air and ground activity seen across the tour."

The flying was only one way in which the team and the tour projected Global Britain and supported a range of interests important to the UK.

More than 125 ground events were staged during the deployment – spanning business receptions promoting trade,

workshops on leadership and school visits highlighting science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM).

An innovative marketing and media campaign made it the Red Arrows' most visible overseas activity yet. Almost two billion people were reached via all channels.

The tour's official logo was omnipresent and #RedArrowsTour trended on social media. There were 300 million Twitter impressions alone – many posts featuring striking imagery taken by the four deployed Service photographers.

A weekly podcast was made available via the BBC Sounds app – another RAF first – and an embedded television documentary team followed every moment, with a four-part series broadcast on Channel 5.



MEET THE TEAM

THERE are 130 people in the Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team, comprising aircrew, engineers and support staff.

Red Arrows pilots have all previously flown RAF Typhoon or Tornado aircraft operationally, on the frontline – one of the prerequisites before an application to join the team is possible.

Also, they must have amassed 1,500 hours in the cockpit, be classed as above average in their flying role and pass a thorough selection process, involving interviews, tests and peer assessments.

A pilot will then usually spend three years with the team before returning to the frontline, instructional or staff duties.

The Officer Commanding is responsible for the entire team, while the Team Leader – known as Red 1 – leads the nine-ship display, choreographs the show's formations and coordinates training.

Meanwhile, a 10th pilot – Red 10 – flies the spare jet and is the team's safety supervisor, being in place on the ground at each display and maintaining radio contact with Red 1.



Also remaining with the Red Arrows across North America was one A400M Atlas, which moved equipment and reliably shuttled the detachment's support staff – a Whole Force comprising regular personnel, full and part-time reservists and Civil Servants.

Already, the impact of the tour has been recognised by the airshow community, with the Red Arrows receiving a major award from the International Council of Air Shows (ICAS).

Meanwhile, the trade and business-related success of the tour will be felt in the months and years to come.

However, speaking after the Red Arrows returned to the UK, Antony Phillipson, HM Trade Commissioner for North America and British Consul-General in New York, said: "Their being here provided invaluable support to the work of Her Majesty's Government in North America, whether connecting UK exporters with potential buyers, engaging current and potential investors to the UK or helping to build transatlantic partnerships across STEM fields – a huge priority for all three countries.

"The Reds, and their fabulous support team the Blues, demonstrated once again that they are awesome ambassadors for the UK and showcased all that is great about Britain."

For more information about the Red Arrows visit www.raf.mod.uk/reds or like RAF Red Arrows on Facebook or follow @rafredarrows on Twitter and Instagram.

THE 2020 RED ARROWS PILOT LINE-UP IS:

Officer Commanding, Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team – Wing Commander David Montenegro

Red 1 and Team Leader – Squadron Leader Martin Pert

Red 2 – Flight Lieutenant Will Cambridge

Red 3 – Flight Lieutenant Nick Critchell

Red 4 – Flight Lieutenant James Turner

Red 5 – Flight Lieutenant David Simmonds

Red 6 – Flight Lieutenant Jon Bond

Red 7 – Squadron Leader Gregor Ogston

Red 8 – Flight Lieutenant Damo Green

Red 9 and Executive Officer – Squadron Leader Steve Morris

Red 10 and Supervisor – Squadron Leader Adam Collins

Programme HYDRO

Recovery of heating and hot water (HHW) across the Air Estate

HHW is a problem across the Air Estate and steps to start this work took place earlier this year in March 2020. Failures have led to local relocations, impact on our people and consequences for our capability. Acknowledging that this needs to be addressed if the Service is to embrace the opportunities set out in the RAF Campaign, Astra. The Air Force Main Board therefore redirected additional finance from the equipment budget into Programme HYDRO – a targeted campaign to fix failures immediately and recapitalise the Estate over time.

Project HYDRO/1 will:

Minimise failures through restarting preventative maintenance; introduce water softening; accelerate response and recovery times ahead of failures and enable procurement of temporary water heaters, fitting of external hot water connections and remediation asbestos in boiler plant rooms to allow for quicker repairs. HYDRO/1 will have tight governance (with direction from the Chief of the Air Staff, 3* lead, a programme team and routine data reporting) which will help oversee and drive the Programme. Collectively, these measures will dramatically reduce HHW induced disruption.

A longer-term HYDRO/2 will:

Address the fundamental problem – that the Air Estate is largely pre-war, needs comprehensive recapitalisation and intelligent investment. HYDRO/2 will be delivered through a sequence of Estate development plans prioritised by the Main Board. HHW will be a major factor that influences this sequence, alongside runways, new equipment, accommodation and family support facilities. This is where more than £1.5 billion will be spent over the next 10 years.

RAF FF Director, Maria Lyle said:

"This subject has come up again and again in workshops and discussions with the RAF Families Federation, raised by those living in Single Living Accommodation at sites across the RAF. It is good to see it being gripped. There will be some hard funding and project management choices coming I am sure, and we will be following developments with interest."

Key points

- Programme HYDRO is a key Air Force Main Board priority, driven by the Deputy Commander Capability with progress to be reviewed monthly by the Chief of the Air Staff.
- HYDRO will recover HHW in 2 phases: short-term measures in the next 2 years to recover hot water quickly, and longer-term recapitalisation of our estate over 10 years.
- HYDRO/1 has already started and will complete before Apr 22. It will be guided by an RAF Estate 'heat map' and a 'worst-first' plan led by HQ Air.
- HYDRO/1 will restart boiler maintenance, start water softening, identify spares, lease temporary water heaters, fit external water connections, remove underground asbestos and be run by a dedicated team.
- HYDRO/2 will recapitalise our complete estate, including underground district HHW, over the next 10 years and beyond. It will be a prime factor in the HQ Air strategic infrastructure plan, along with accommodation, new aircraft/equipment, runways and family support facilities.
- HYDRO/2 will be led by an RAF airfield review that will identify the RAF's long-term footprint and sequence for major works, which will include HHW systems.



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ARMED FORCES COVENANT UPDATE



The MOD's Covenant Team has been continuing to work during the COVID-19 times and share their latest news with us.

Covenant Legislation

The team is continuing to work on the government's commitment made in the Queen's speech to strengthen the Covenant in legislation. Bringing this to Parliament requires a significant amount of engagement with Other Government Departments and local authorities who are responsible for delivering most of the services that will be covered by the legislation. Unsurprisingly, the focus of all our key stakeholders is currently coronavirus but we are continuing to work on legislation where we can to ensure this important project does not lose momentum. We will continue to update you as this work progresses.

Vehicle Finance

We continue to get emails from personnel who have taken out a Personal Contract Purchase (PCP) to buy a car and then find that when they are posted overseas, they can't take the car with them and are required to pay a considerable sum to get out of the contract. All personnel are advised to look very closely at the terms and conditions of any finance deal they sign up to and ensure that they tell the salesman that they are in the Armed Forces and have a liability to serve overseas. This will help in the event of any future dispute. With the help of the Finance Leasing Association, we have managed to resolve many of the cases favourably, but there is absolutely no guarantee!

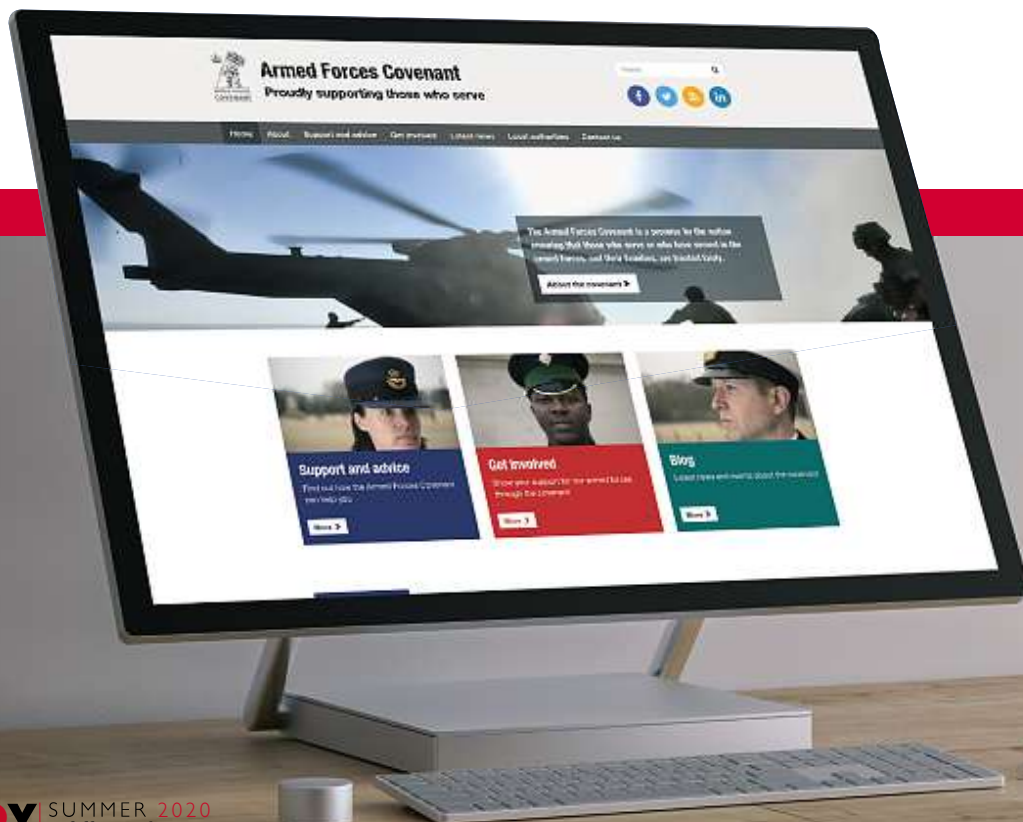
There's some good advice about PCPs and alternative forms for car purchase from the [moneysavingexpert.com](https://www.moneysavingexpert.com). The RAF FF also provided an article on this subject too in the Winter edition of Envoy (pg 29).

Returning from Overseas? – get your 30 Hours Free Childcare

The Directorate Children and Young People (DCYP) has worked closely with the Department for Education (DfE) and HM Revenue & Customs to ensure service parents returning to England from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and overseas can apply for a 30 hours childcare code before they arrive back in England. This will ensure that entitlements are not missed, especially when parents move mid-term and would not be able to apply within termly deadlines set by DfE.

Parents who are due to return to England, after a term deadline, but are aware of this move prior to a term deadline, can apply for a manual 30 hours code for their return. Parents must call the Childcare Service Helpline on 0300 123 4097 and request a manual application. More information is available immediately following this update.

And finally, as always, if you have comments, suggestions or feel that you have been disadvantaged as a result of being in the Armed Forces, please email the Covenant team on Covenant-Mailbox@mod.gov.uk or contact the RAF Families Federation online, in the first instance, at www.raf-ff.org.uk/report-an-issue-form





Ministry
of Defence

30 hours free childcare

Parents should be aware that in overseas locations the MOD funds the free childcare entitlement, and prior to being posted back to the UK, parents should read the country specific instructions below, to find out what their entitlement will be and what they need to do to apply. England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland offer differing entitlements and the application process may vary.

Moving to England

Parents are unable to apply for 30 hours free childcare online whilst posted outside of England. To allow parents to not lose out on this entitlement, a manual process has been put in place to ensure parents can access the 30 hours code. This enables parents to plan for their return. Parents who are due to return to England, after a term deadline, but are aware of this move prior to a term deadline, can apply for a manual 30 hours code for their return. Parents must call the Childcare Service helpline on **0300 123 4097** and request a manual application. See table for term deadlines and when to apply. HMRC will determine eligibility for the scheme by completing a manual application at the time of the call. If all eligibility criteria are met, the parent will need to provide HMRC with evidence of returning to England. This evidence will be in the form of an assignment order or civilian posting notice. When this document is received and verified by HMRC, the parent will be issued with a manual 30 hours code to the email address supplied when completing the application. HMRC will provide details of where to send documents at time of application. The 30 hours code can be given to the childcare provider prior to, or, upon their return to England. Parents can apply for a 30 hours code from when their child is aged 2 years and 36 weeks. Children qualify from the term following their third birthday.

When your child turns 3	When they can get 30 hours from	Recommended time to apply
1 September – 31 December	1 January	15 October – 30 November
1 January – 31 March	1 April	15 January – 28 February
1 April – 31 August	1 September	15 June – 31 July

Moving to Scotland

The Scottish Government has pledged to increase paid-for nursery places from the current 16 hours to 30 hours for children aged 3 and 4, and eligible two-year-olds, by August 2020. Please visit Scottish government pages for the latest information, <https://www.mygov.scot/childcare-costs-help/funded-early-learning-and-childcare/>.

Moving to Wales

Wales provides 30 hours a week of free early education and childcare for working parents of children aged 3 and 4 years for 48 weeks of the year. Applications are dealt with directly by each Local Authority's Family Information Service (FIS) where the parents reside, <https://gov.wales/find-your-local-family-information-service.>

Moving to Northern Ireland

Parents of children aged 3 and 4 years can apply to receive 12.5 hours per week of free, also known as funded, preschool education. This allocation can only be taken over 2.5 hours per day, 5 days a week, during term time. Places are provided by nursery schools, primary schools with nursery units and some voluntary and private providers. The places cannot be provided by childminders. Please visit <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/parents/childcare> for further information.



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Education Support Fund 2020/2021

OPEN FOR BIDS (as at 1 June 2020)!

Due to ongoing rebasing and continued high mobility and deployment rates, the Education Support Fund (ESF) has been extended for another year and has £3 million this year to be awarded to help support service children (an increase of £1 million from last year!)

This is great news as we know that many schools and service children have benefitted hugely from the ESF since its inception in 2011. Previously funded projects have included; funding for additional classroom support (such as ELSA); staff time and/or resources for deployment lunchtime or extra-curricular clubs such as forest schools; community initiatives supporting military children and bringing them together with civilian children and families; and books for school libraries covering topics that service children may find helpful in settling into their new school and also if they are separated from their serving parent due to deployment.

Who is eligible?

Publicly funded schools, academies, sixth form colleges and free schools throughout the UK who experience high levels of mobility and/or deployment. Local Authorities can also apply on behalf of schools in their area.

Previously successful applications have been able to demonstrate a good relationship with their Service community.

Where to get help with your bid?

- Read through the eligibility criteria very carefully – this and the application forms can be accessed here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/mod-support-fund-for-schools-with-service-children-grant-application-pack
- Review the example applications on gov.uk which have been made available as best practise.
- Talk to other schools who have been successful and get guidance with your bid-writing from Service Children In State Schools (SCISS): www.sciss.org.uk/

Our top tips for a school's application:

- Make sure you demonstrate clearly the impact of mobility and/or deployment on your service children.
- Give ALL the information and data requested in the form.

- If you are a school with fewer numbers of service children think about collaborating with other schools/colleges in your area.
- Remember to strongly demonstrate your school's good relationship with the service community.

Chairman of the SCISS network, Steph Fawdry said: "SCISS are absolutely delighted to see the return of the ESF as we know how vital this fund is and the positive impact that successful schools have had in ensuring they can make a real difference for their service children. Schools have a real opportunity here to consider how a bid for additional funding can enrich and go beyond what they already have in place using their Service Pupil Premium funding and help in mitigating any negative effects that exceptional levels of mobility and deployment can have on the well-being of the children in their school."

Louise Briggs, our Education and Childcare specialist is also well versed in ESF bids and would be happy to answer any questions, her contact details are below.

What can parents do to help their child's school?

- Take this article to your school governors and headteacher and ensure they have seen that this funding is available.
- Do you have experience of writing funding applications and can help your school with its bid?
- Make suggestions to your school as to how the funding could best support your child and other service children (within the criteria of course!)

What can Local Authorities do to help schools in their area?

- Ensure all schools with service children are aware of the funding.
- Can you put in a joint bid to support multiple schools in your area?
- Do you have bid-writing skills within your team to offer help to schools writing bids?

How long do we have to apply?

This funding round closes at midday on Wednesday 7 October 2020.

For more information, contact Louise Briggs, Policy Advisor (Education and Childcare) on louise.briggs@raf-ff.org.uk

EVIDENCE

As I write this article I am entering my second week working from home as the nation adapts to COVID-19 restrictions. The Evidence Team continues to support the RAF Family from various locations through uncertain and ever evolving situation.

During the last quarter we have received approximately 80 reported issues, a third of which relating to housing, in particular issues with damp and loss of heating. Additionally we have seen a few issues relating to spouses returning from overseas and claiming benefits. This resulted in Ken and I undertaking a very informative visit to the RAF Benevolent Fund at their headquarters in London to meet with their benefits specialists to share their knowledge of the benefits system.

We continue to deliver presentations to Phase I recruits in addition to those newly promoted personnel at Airmen's Command Squadron. In early March Caroline and I, accompanied by Nicola from Naval Families Federation, visited SHAPE in Belgium to speak at the Community Liaison Officers' Conference. Although curtailed somewhat due to COVID-19 we managed to speak with a number of families who shared their experiences, both positive and negative of being assigned overseas. A big thank you goes to all at SHAPE who hosted us during our stay.

Engagement with Reservists continues to develop and we have arranged visits to a number of Squadrons later this year. In the meantime Nick from the Comms Team has created posters which have been distributed – if you are a Reservist or a family member and are experiencing issues related to their service then please remember we are here to help you too.



Richie Morgan
richard.morgan@raf-ff.org.uk

POLICY

Along with everyone else, the Policy Team have been resorting to the multitude of online methods of keeping in touch with our key stakeholders.

Whilst we despaired at witnessing so many decision-orientated meetings disappear from our diaries, we also immediately felt the huge sense of mutual desire both internally and externally to carry on regardless, and turned our attentions to blocks of work that can be tackled in our new working environments.

These have included refreshing and updating our Health and Education pages on our website, and publishing another of our Briefing Notes - this one on Healthcare providing guidance to the NHS during development of their Armed Forces Healthcare Strategy 2020-2024. Alison shares more in this section. We have also been providing feedback and insight into the Covenant Tracker, which is the document used by the Covenant Reference Group (CRG) to ensure covenant commitments are being met. The CRG is a senior Cross Government Group, with representation from a wide range of Departments (Depts of Health, Education, Home Office) and Chaired by Chief of Defence Personnel.

Being a part of this group gives us the opportunity to ensure the Cabinet Office and CRG are focusing on the key areas that we believe most change is required.

At the time of going to press, we are still awaiting publication of the Andrew Selous Report (as mentioned in the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2019) but we have been made aware that there are a large number of recommendations within and Alison, Louise and I look forward to working with our colleagues within the MOD and the government agencies to move these forward.



Lisa Thipthorp
lisa.thipthorp@
raf-ff.org.uk

**ROYAL
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SNA

HEALTHCARE BRIEFING NOTE FOR RAF PERSONNEL AND FAMILIES – HOW DOES IT WORK?

As the Policy Advisor for Health and Additional Needs here at the Families Federation, part of my role has been to navigate and understand the vast healthcare arena that exists for RAF personnel and their families. As I settled into my role, I found myself writing notes and flowcharts to remind me of the different processes and support services available for Service families. This subsequently led to the writing of this briefing note and was released during the end of May to signify the end of the Families Federation's 'Health and Wellbeing' focus month.

Topics included:

- Healthcare for RAF personnel and mobilised Reservists.
- Healthcare for RAF families and non-mobilised Reservists.
- Healthcare and the Armed Forces Covenant.
- Support available if personnel or a family member has an additional need or disability.
- Support available if personnel or a family member has difficulties with mental health.
- Health policy.
- What to do if an RAF family has issues with accessing NHS services.

Colleagues from NHS England and Improvement, RAF, The RAF Association, the RAF Benevolent Fund, MOD and SSAFA were consulted during the writing of the briefing note to ensure the contents are accurate. Many thanks to those who offered feedback, it is much appreciated

alison.cotton@
raf-ff.org.uk



Jade Coe

COMMUNICATIONS

As with all communication teams in any organisation, this last quarter has been a bit of a blur. With all the COVID-19 information coming in from far and wide – we have been busy filtering what seems like hundreds of pages into meaningful 'pockets of support' online for you to make use of. This included our interactive infographic which seemed to go down well!

I am also really excited to introduce you to a new member of the communications team – Jade Coe who joined us in April as our Web Content Officer. Jade's role will be to grow and enhance the online content available for personnel and families. In particular she will be focused on sharing information in support of those taking an overseas posting, or currently serving overseas. Jade is currently taking in much of the research work carried out by our Dispersed Families Project Manager, Tor Johnson (who is on an overseas tour herself now as a family). Jade is also busy on other internationally-linked induction meetings with many stakeholders in the RAF/Armed Forces, whilst already making a impact with ideas on how we evolve our website. So, if you have ideas or suggestions on people to speak to, please do get in touch.

Caroline Woodward

caroline.woodward@raf-ff.org.uk

APSHOT

[AN INSIGHT INTO WHAT OUR TEAMS ARE FOCUSING ON]

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Accommodation **MATTERS**

We start this quarter's article with an apology – in the Spring copy of Envoy on the Combined Accommodation Assessment System (CAAS) on page 32, we highlighted that a change had been made to the Decent Homes + (DH+) Standard in assessing Service Family Accommodation (SFA) CAAS Banding - this was incorrect. Following clarification from the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), no such change has taken place and the CAAS Methodology remains extant. To avoid any further ambiguity, that feature should have read:

“SFA Kitchen and Bathroom Improvement Programme

In recognition that the condition of kitchen/bathrooms across the SFA estate varies, DIO Regional Delivery Accommodation has ring-fenced funding over the next four years to meet a higher standard of modernity. The intent is, therefore, to deliver an estate-wide kitchen and bathroom improvement programme targeting all SFA where the kitchen is 20 years old or more and/or the bathroom is 30 years old or more.”

As the weather has improved so we have seen a decrease in the common winter housing issues raised to us. However the variety of issues does seem to be on the increase – from noisy neighbours to gas supply problems via questions about surplus SFA, the team have been busy trying to help each individual and family who reach out to us.

With the issue of noisy neighbours being raised and with the increase in those of us working from home for lengthy periods it is worth highlighting the need to consider our neighbours and aware of our responsibilities to be good neighbours.

SOME KEY POINTS ARE:

- A breach of the terms of this Licence could be cause for a Notice to Vacate the SFA to be issued.
- You must not in any way harass your neighbours or cause a nuisance or annoyance or allow members of your household invited guests or pets to cause a nuisance or annoyance to any neighbours.
- You must not make or allow members of your household, invited guests or pets to make any noise that causes a nuisance to your neighbours that can be heard outside the property between 11pm and 8am.



LONG TERM RELATIONSHIPS

One common theme across the period has been the increase in questions about Long Term Relationships (LTR) and applying for SFA on a surplus license.

In February the requirement for four years' service was removed as a qualifying factor in applications to cohabit in surplus SFA (2020DIN01-014). The key remaining factors are being over 18, having completed Phase 1 training and to be serving on a regular engagement in the UK Armed Forces or be a Full Commitment Reservist.

The requirements to register a long term relationship remain the same but are worth reiterating as this is an area of confusion raised to us on a regular basis - you should consult JSP 464 Chapter 1 of Vol 1, Part 1 and/or consult your station Personnel Support Flight (PSF) for specific guidance.

We would certainly recommend speaking to your PSF staff early as we have a number of enquiries around the evidence required to back up the registering of a LTR and the time period it needs to cover.

FUTURE ACCOMMODATION MODEL (FAM):

The FAM Cell at RAF Wittering has recently stood up and are keen to help you and field any questions you may have on the topic **people-famcell-wit@mod.gov.uk**. They have provided a separate article and follows on from our news to you.

WIDER WORK:

For most of the last quarter we have continued our regular meetings with DIO, alongside the other Families Federations, seeking to represent you and your families' views to the organisation.

Much of the recent meetings have revolved around improvements to how DIO and Amey communicate with those living in SFA. We have attended meetings in this regard specifically on CAAS but also on wider SFA issues. There is ongoing work on these fronts and hopefully we will soon see the results of this work.

We continue to work with Amey and DIO informing them of the 'real world' problems faced by those in SFA and now increasingly looking forward to the implementation of the Future Defence Infrastructure Services (FDIS) and the hoped improvements it will bring. These meetings continue even during the period of social distancing, as the use of dial in and Skype meetings become the norm for all of us.

To report any accommodation issues or concerns to the RAF Families Federation, simply go to our homepage at **www.raf-ff.org.uk** and click on the red 'Report an issue' button on the top right corner of the homepage.



The future's **bright:** the future is **FAM**

As we reported in the Spring edition of Envoy the Future Accommodation Model (FAM) is being piloted at RAF Wittering. FAM provides financial support to Service personnel who want to rent or buy a home, giving more choice over where and with whom you live. The choice to live at RAF Wittering in Single Living Accommodation (SLA) or Service Families Accommodation (SFA) continues. In this issue of the magazine we wanted to answer your questions about the pilot, with help from the FAM Cell team.

YOUR QUESTIONS

Q: I've heard about FAM, but I don't know whether we are 'in' or 'out' of the pilot?

To be part of the FAM pilot your Service person must have four years' service, at least 12 months left on their posting to RAF Wittering and be part of an eligible Unit Identification Number (UIN). If you were already living at RAF Wittering when the pilot started on 1 June 2020 you can opt-in to the pilot if you wish, but you don't have to change your accommodation if you don't want to. Anyone joining assigned to RAF Wittering from 1 June onwards will join the pilot and choose whether to live in SLA, SFA, private rented accommodation or buy your own home.

Q: What impact is COVID-19 having on the pilot?

This is an unprecedented time for all of us and the FAM team is closely following government guidance and adhering to its advice. This means the FAM Cell teams are now all working from home. Although the FAM pilot will operate as usual anyone requesting the Private Rental Scheme (PRS) will have their Accommodation Preference Form (APF) processed, but have to abide by the Government's restrictions on moving home. This means that they will be able to access their payments and move into a rental property only when the Government tells us all it is safe to do so again.

Q. If a couple are both serving then will they each get an allowance?

If you are both assigned to RAF Wittering one person in your couple must be nominated as the 'primary SP'. If you decide to rent that person will receive the FAM payments. That person will also pay the expected Personal Contribution, which is the part you pay towards a rental property. You can, of course, split this payment between you making it more affordable.

If one person in your couple is assigned to a site that isn't RAF Wittering, but you still want to live together, then they may be entitled to either SLA in the working week at the other site, or an additional payment. This will depend on the location they are assigned to so talk to the RAF Wittering FAM Cell who will help you find out more.

Q. If we buy a property near RAF Wittering what support is there for core payments and legal fees?

If you are eligible for FAM and choose to buy a property after 1 June 2020 you can get a core payment of £125 per month to put towards your mortgage. If you are a first time buyer you could also be eligible for Refund of Legal Expenses (New Buyer) of up to £1,500, and you can also use Forces Help to Buy.





Speaking about the questions that her team are most frequently being asked Danielle Rigby, FAM Implementation Lead at RAF Wittering, says:

“We’ve had a really positive response. This pilot doesn’t look to take anything away from you, but rather increase your options. Giving greater flexibility and choice in where and with who you live. Whether this means moving up to 50 miles away to be closer to extended family members or getting out of the block and renting locally with mates it really is all about your choice.”

To find out more visit the FAM pages of the RAF Families Federation website. There are also lots of other resources:

- GOV.UK has lots more information on FAM: www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-accommodation-model-what-you-need-to-know
- Forces Help to Buy: www.gov.uk/guidance/forces-help-to-buy
- Access the Discover My Benefits tool to see what payments and allowances you could get: www.discovermybenefits.mod.gov.uk/raf/future-accommodation-model-fam
- Plus, you can talk to your FAM Cell, reaching them via people-famcell-wit@mod.gov.uk

Q: We are interested in FAM but we already own my own home. Could you tell me how FAM supports people who already own a home?

If you own a home over 50 miles from RAF Wittering and live in SLA during the working week then you can claim the FAM Core Payment of £125 a month, plus Get You Home. FAM replaces the SLA waiver with the Core Payment, so you can put this payment towards the cost of SLA in the working week and/or your mortgage. If you live within 50 miles of the base then it is reasonable that you live in this home and commute during your posting so you won’t get a FAM payment, but you can continue to claim Home to Duty (HTD).

Q: I’m recently divorced and have shared custody of children – could you tell me how FAM could support this please?

If your children are in full time education and you have custody of them for more than 80 nights of the year then they count as dependants under FAM. This applies whether they’re your biological children or step children. You will need to register them as FAM dependants on JPA first, before submitting your FAM choice. This means that the size of property you’re eligible for (whether SFA or privately rented) is larger to meet this need. To find out what you could get, search online for Discover My Benefits and use the FAM calculator.

Q: If I already rent privately will I be eligible for FAM?

Yes. If you rent within 50 miles of RAF Wittering and meet the eligibility criteria you can apply for FAM after 1 June 2020. To see what rental payment you could receive use the Discover My Benefits tool.



How the RAF FF can help – **JOB SEEKERS ALLOWANCE**

Ken Wood
RAF FF
Evidence
Assistant



As well as offering advice, ensuring clients are talking to the right people and asking the right questions, all the evidence gathered (stored on an encrypted database) is used to highlight potential 'themes' of emerging issues in the Armed Forces. The Families Federation use that anonymised evidence to lobby government for policy changes – all aimed at making life better for you.

Here Ken Wood focuses on a case study around Job Seekers Allowance.

The issue

A partner of a serving member of the RAF (Niki) had recently returned to the UK from an overseas posting. She was having trouble claiming Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) and contacted us. Niki had a pre-arranged appointment with her local Jobcentre but prior to this received a telephone call informing her that she wasn't eligible for JSA, as she hadn't worked for the last four years and paid tax. She explained she was a military spouse returning from an overseas posting, and had full Class 1 National Insurance (NI) contributions during the period abroad as she had claimed her NI contributions for the period whilst living abroad. Unfortunately this was to no avail.

How we helped

Families Federation Evidence Assistant, Ken Wood, made contact with Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) on Niki's behalf in an attempt to resolve the issue. Following this, she visited the Jobcentre and completed all the relevant paperwork to start the claim. Unfortunately she was again informed by DWP that she was not entitled to JSA, and to submit a case for mandatory reconsideration if she wished to appeal. Niki was made aware that her NI contributions were Class 3 and not Class 1 that she needed for JSA. This was because the MOD CA1 form she completed at the end of June whilst overseas (a form that needs to be completed and sent to HMRC to gain NI credits) had not been processed as there was a backlog. She was given an urgent referral from HMRC and they updated the records within 48 hrs, informing her it was all now updated. Niki was surprised it had taken six months for HMRC to update her records, and it had taken her a lot of effort to get to the bottom of this problem.

On contacting DWP again due to having heard nothing from her mandatory reconsideration, Niki was told she was not entitled to JSA and had never been entitled as

she had not worked and paid tax for the last two years – finding herself going back to the start again! She once again explained the government guidelines and reasons as to why she was entitled, but to no avail again.

Ken became involved again and contacted the Armed Forces Champion for DWP in Niki's geographical area and requested a full breakdown of the decision to enable him to understand the reasoning behind the decision. The Armed Forces Champion escalated it to a Partner Support Manager who advised submission of mandatory reconsideration again; advising what to outline in the appeal, which was very helpful. This information was passed to Niki who completed her appeal again.

Armed with the evidence of this particular issue, the Director of the RAF Families Federation (Maria Lyle) subsequently met with Will Quince MP, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for DWP.

The outcome

After raising the issue at ministerial level the case was reviewed again at DWP and Niki was given £960.00 in arrears which was fantastic news. We now have a validated process laid down for the future, collaborating with the Army Families Federation who have also encountered similar issues - a great example of the Families Federations pulling together for the Armed Forces community.

In this case it took over four months to reach a successful conclusion, including intervention at ministerial level. Niki never gave up and carried on regardless of the numerous hurdles she had to go through, but eventually it was worth it. In addition we gained a valuable insight into this area for future cases.

Not every case ends up with success, but we are always able to explain the reason a decision has not been made in favour of the serviceman or woman, and their family members – and if an emerging theme of disadvantage can be seen we are in a position to do the lobbying.

Contact

You can contact the RAF Families Federation on +44 (0)1780 781650 or you can log an issue online by going to the homepage on raf-ff.org.uk and clicking on the red, top right corner 'Report an issue' form.

Niki gave us consent to use her name in this article.



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Universal Credit for **ARMED FORCES PERSONNEL AND THEIR FAMILIES**

Universal Credit is a single award paid monthly, which has been introduced to replace the following benefits:

- Housing Benefit
- Child Tax Credit
- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Working Tax Credit

If you live in Service Family Accommodation (SFA) or in the Private Rented Sector and are liable to make payments of rent, you may qualify for support with your housing costs in Universal Credit. Support is also available in Universal Credit for those with a mortgage.

To apply for housing support in Universal Credit, you will need to provide evidence of your liability to pay rent (the licence agreement) to your work coach together with evidence that you are living in the accommodation (such as a utility bill or bank statement).'

Work Coaches and armed forces champions have been provided with specific guidance to further support Service personnel and their families in claiming Universal Credit.

To find out more about Universal Credit and how to apply, visit www.gov.uk/universal-credit or alternatively visit www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-you for an introduction to Universal Credit for new claimants.

If you're already receiving benefits visit: www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-what-to-do-if-youre-already-getting-benefits.



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Financial Aspects of Resettlement



FIGHTING FOR THE FORCES
AND THEIR FAMILIES

Servicemen and women are alerted by their Service to the existence of the important briefings that are available as part of the resettlement process, but spouses and partners will not necessarily know that they could benefit from some of them too.



In this short article, Mary Petley of the Forces Pension Society focuses on the Financial Aspects of Resettlement (FAR) briefing, outlining the topics covered and why they are important in family decision making.

The FAR is a one-day course comprising of two briefings. The first, which is delivered by members of the Forces Pension Society's Pensions Team, is about all aspects of the pension entitlement; the second covers wider financial matters such as mortgages, insurances and wills.

Entitlements have never been more confusing. The majority of Service personnel will have been members of Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) 75 or AFPS 05 when they joined the Armed Forces and will have been transferred to AFPS 15 on the 1 April 2015. Some who are members of the Full Time Reserve Service (FTRS) will have been members of the Reserve Forces Pension Scheme (RFPS) and will have been transferred to AFPS 15 too. Those who were in service on 1 April 2012 and were transferred to AFPS 15 will be waiting to find out what the MOD intend to do in the light of the successful age discrimination challenge by the Judges and Firefighters to the 2015 public sector pension scheme transitional arrangements. It is important that members and their partners understand the position as it is now in order that, should they have a choice to make about future scheme membership, they can make it in an informed way.

When the MOD's plans are known they will be well publicised and, until they are, we all need to be patient and be sure that we understand the pensions picture as it is rather than speculate as to how it might look in the future.

The FAR brief covers not only member benefits payable by all three AFPSs and RFPS but wider entitlements too. The following should give you a feel for its importance:

Firstly, prior to discharge, Service personnel are expected to complete a Pens Form 1. For those leaving with terminal benefits, this form covers pension and Early Departure Payment (EDP) Scheme entitlements, commutation and inverse commutation, nomination and allocation. Are you

and your spouse or partner confident that you know enough about the subjects to make informed decisions on any options the form covers? You would be surprised how many people tell us that they had filled the form in prior to the briefing and realised as a result of the briefing that they had not got it quite right! The Pens Form 1 can be found at this link: www.gov.uk/guidance/veterans-uk-armed-forces-pensions-forms

Do you understand how pensions are assessed? If those benefits are preserved (i.e. not payable immediately on discharge) – do you know when they become payable and the circumstances in which they can be claimed early?

Who actually pays AFPS benefits and what are the payment timescales that you can expect? Who do you contact if you need to report a change of circumstance?

Do you understand how the EDP Scheme works in your family's case? Currently most Service personnel will have benefits in either AFPS 75 or AFPS 05 and AFPS 15. That means, had they originally been an AFPS 75 member, they could leave with an AFPS 75 Immediate Pension and an AFPS 15 EDP or, had they originally been an AFPS 05 member, they could leave with two separate EDP entitlements? Do you understand the differences in AFPS 05 and AFPS 15 EDP benefits, how long they are payable for?

What about any commutation or inverse commutation? Do you understand the implication each might have on tax? For Resettlement Commutation, will family pensions be reduced if the member commutes and dies before age 55?

Are you planning to live abroad? Will this affect AFPS/RFPS pensions? What is a "Double Taxation Agreement"? What about your state pension – will it still be paid and, if so, will it rise every year as it would in UK?



What if the worst were to happen – how would your family be looked after by the pension scheme? Are you married or in a civil partnership? Are unmarried partners eligible for benefits? What about the children?

We hope that this has given you a feel for the range of issues covered by the FAR briefing and why it might be a good idea for 'the other half' to attend- in our experience they ask some very good questions. To coin a phrase, two heads are better than one! While the UK is in lockdown due to the coronavirus, FAR briefings are being delivered virtually

through web-enabled conferencing. The details can be found on the CTP website at: www.ctp.org.uk/resettlement-courses/core-workshop/FAR+-+All+Ranks

If you are a Member of the Forces Pension Society and have any pension-related questions, contact us as www.pensionenquiriesatforpen.co.uk

If you are not a Member but would like to know more about us, visit www.forcespensionsociety.org





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Forces Families Jobs – Online training opportunities

www.forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk

Forces Families Jobs (FFJs) is a go-to place for training and employment for family members of currently serving UK military personnel, including older sons and daughters. FFJs continues to provide a free gateway to training opportunities available; many of which are available online. Here we share a few ideas of what you can tap into.

LifeWorks-Families

The LifeWorks-Families understanding career coaches and vocational assessors are on call to support remotely and via their online portal and all you need to do is register, call 0800 319 6844 or send a quick email to lifeworks@rbli.co.uk and the team will do the rest.

Accountancy Learning

Bookkeepers can work anywhere and at times that fit with a busy life. Online platforms allow you to continue servicing customers even if your family is relocated. Free sample courses teach you double entry bookkeeping and lets you assess if bookkeeping is for you. Delivered online, it is accessible at home and starts you on your path to becoming a licenced, qualified bookkeeper. ELCAS funding is available for level 3 qualifications as you progress. www.accountancylearning.co.uk

British Sign Language

You can access Introducing British Sign Language whenever you like (desktop, laptop, tablet or mobile). Study at your own pace and at a time that is convenient to you. You can access the course for 1 year. Designed to be studied over approximately 16-20hrs - 1.5 - 2hrs/week: www.british-sign.co.uk

OpenLearn from the Open University

Anyone can learn for free on OpenLearn, but signing-up will give you access to your personal learning profile and record of achievements that you earn while you study.

Simply go online to www.open.edu/openlearn

Coursera

The most popular courses on this platform are fully accessible without payment. Includes subjects such as Financial Markets, Learning How to Learn: Powerful mental tools to help you master tough subjects and the Science of Well-Being: www.coursera.org/collections/popular-free-courses

Reed

There are more than 40,000 courses to choose on reed.co.uk; some of which are free such as Essential IT Skills Level 2, Understanding Autism, Nutrition and Health Level 2, Management and Leadership to Business and Administration: www.reed.co.uk/courses

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC):

Mooc.org is an extension of edX.org, a leader in online courses. Whether you're interested in learning for yourself, leveraging online courses to educate your workforce or creating a MOOC, edX can help.

Who is eligible to use FFJs?

- Spouses and partners of currently Serving and Reserve personnel, and adult children (aged 18-25).
- Spouses and partners of service personnel who have left the Armed Forces within the last 12 months, and adult children (aged 18-25).
- Bereaved spouses and partners for up to two years post service, and adult children (aged 18-25).

Disclaimer: Inclusion on this platform does not suggest that Forces Families Jobs endorses the products or services detailed here and you should seek appropriate professional guidance where required.



Forces
Families
Jobs

**RFEA**THE FORCES
EMPLOYMENT
CHARITY

Families Programme



Lee Johnston, Families Employment Advisor at RFEA – The Forces Employment Charity, says:

“Frequent moves, relatively isolated locations, employer reluctance, limited childcare options and the complexities of building a normal career, often mean that many military spouses and partners can face unique challenges getting back into work.

“As the wife of Royal Marine, I should know! That’s also why I know the support that we offer through RFEA’s Families Programme makes such an important difference.

“RFEA’s Families Programme was launched to help the spouses and partners of serving and ex-Forces personnel into employment, with the help of a dedicated Families Employment Advisor who really understands their situation and can offer completely tailored solutions to suit the individual.

“Our focus is on reaching partners and spouses and providing them with the support they need, including how to understand their skills fit with potential jobs and develop their strengths to employers. We do this in a way that is convenient for our clients, such as over the phone, via email or through virtual consultations.

“The Families Programme also works closely with the Forces Families Jobs’ Board, set up by the Families Federations, and uses RFEA’s extensive network of over 9,000 employers who actively recruit service leavers and veterans.

“We are incredibly proud of the difference our Families Programme has already made to those who have entered our programme. Thanks to generous funding from Lloyd’s Patriotic Fund and the Government Equalities Office’s Returners Fund, we’ve now been able to extend our programme to enable more advisors to reach even more people through our programme and continue to enhance the lives of military spouses for many more years to come.

“The programme spans the whole of the country and is open to civilian spouses and partners of still serving and ex-service personnel including divorced spouses and widows, subject to eligibility checks.

“Anyone seeking support or further information about RFEA’s Families Programme can find out more by visiting www.rfea.org.uk/families”

Danielle Fitzwilliam, whose partner is currently serving in the British Army, is a beneficiary of the Families Programme. She says:

“Finding meaningful work when your partner is serving in the military can be a real challenge. We have two young children, so when he is away it makes it hard to juggle shift patterns with school runs. This has an impact on how much work I can or cannot commit to, which then knocks on to our financial situation as well.

“I came across RFEA through a parent forum in my local area. My advisor, Lee, was a breath of fresh air – she understood where I was coming from, from the get-go. After a discussion about my situation, she sent me all sorts of different types of jobs which worked around my needs, including jobs based from home, or those with flexible working hours.

“When I got an interview for my current role, my advisor was incredibly supportive. I normally panic in interviews, but this time I didn’t and I 100% put that down to the help I had from her! She knew the organisation really well and was able to talk me through their processes, as well as coach me in how to answer well during an interview.

“I am so thankful to the invaluable support I had from Lee – nothing was ever too much trouble – she was worth her weight in gold. Thanks to her I now have a superb role in a great company that offers the flexibility I need – I am so excited to get going.”



An online network can be **good for your mental health** as well as **your career**



Remote working was on the rise in the military community even before COVID-19 made it mainstream, as more spouses are building themselves careers or businesses that can be adapted to frequent moves. Whilst this is great for your finances and your career, the impact that working at home on your own can have on your mental health can be considerable, and this is where the **Military Coworking Network (MCN)** comes in.

The MCN is a community of military spouses working together to help each other professionally; providing inspiration, advice and a shared network of contacts. We believe that being able to work remotely and have flexible, portable, jobs could transform our community.

As well as running a digital community we are also setting up **coworking hubs** on military bases; fully equipped office spaces where we can go to work and study together; recreating the professional office environment and work friends that we have often had to leave behind.

Helping reduce social isolation is one of the main things that drives us. As military spouses we are often faced with moving to a new area where we don't know anyone.

In some areas the community support provided by friendly neighbours, toddler groups, school runs, or fitness classes can be fantastic, but none of it is work-related and you have to be a) brave enough to break in, b) at a stage in life where these things

happen (if you don't have kids it can be isolating and teenagers are not so keen on mums organising play dates), and c) in an area where people are making the effort to keep the community spirit alive and kicking.

The movement restrictions we are all experiencing have served to highlight how important our communities are. We may be isolated from each other physically, but online there is a community chatting, empathising and encouraging each other in these testing times.

The MCN online community breaks down barriers that are sometimes raised high, particularly in military life. We want to know you, not who your partner is. There is no judgement about your level of education or your lifestyle choices. You are welcomed for the input that you give to the community.

The ultimate aim of the network is to have a coworking hub in every military base. Imagine, instead of having to give up your job every time you move, you can take it with you because there is a hub for you to work from remotely. Where you can arrive at a new posting with a network of friends already established because you've connected with them online beforehand. You can start work straight away because you have a super fast wifi connection, and you've already picked up a new client or job in the area because one of the members was advertising it on the network.

This is the MCN dream!

MILITARY COWORKING NETWORK

Jen Duffy @littlewolfstudioart,
RAF Leeming Coworking Hub

Military Coworking Community

militarycoworkingnetwork

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Military Coworking Network

or contact us at:
enquiries.militarycoworking@gmail.com

SUMMER 2020 **ENVOY**
raf-ff.org.uk



BFBS Academy training for the Armed Forces, their families and veterans seeking social media expertise

Over the past 12 months the BFBS Academy – which is part of military charity and media organisation BFBS – has launched two online courses offering in-depth training to help people use social media to grow their business, or to find a career in social media.

Social Media Spouses

It's first course 'Social Media Spouses', which launched in April last year, is designed to address a real need amongst military spouses and partners to obtain the skills they need to find flexible and interesting work that fits around military and family life.

The course is funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust and is the first free online course to offer military spouses and partners vocational, in-depth, fast-track online training in social media, together with their own dedicated digital training community.

Places are limited and open to military spouses or partners only.

'Digital CULTure'

Building on the success of Social Media Spouses, BFBS Academy has developed the same 11-week online course and digital community to enable a wider audience, including Service leavers and others in the armed forces, to gain the skills they need to secure a job in the digital industry or to expand their own business through social media.



The Digital CULTure course costs £399, which includes access to the online community, a course completion certificate and subscription to the monthly newsletter, filled with the latest developments in social media marketing.



There is a 25% military discount, and the money raised with this programme will be put back into the Social Media Spouses programme to fund the ongoing support offered for military spouses.

About the courses

Both courses are taught by the BFBS social media team, who are part of the military community and are responsible for BFBS' social media channels.

They use a combination of online learning tools, live lessons and mentoring and each student will have weekly virtual lessons with a dedicated social media coach, who'll guide and support them throughout the course.

They offer access to an exclusive online community where individuals can find advice on careers in social media, content or campaigns. The course leaders will also offer ongoing support and feedback on anything related to social media.

Both courses focuses on the following areas of social media:

- Understand Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn's algorithms, along with effective strategies to make content stand out in the noisy world of social media.
- Planning, implementation and evaluation of social media campaigns.
- Growing an engaged audience, moderating comments and discussions, and dealing with difficult situations online.
- Taking truly show-stopping images for use in a social media campaign.
- Producing professional social media videos that can compete with the thousands of others out there... just by using a smartphone.
- Creating effective paid-for advertising on Facebook, Twitter & Instagram.
- Understanding the major platforms' built-in analytics tools to score and evaluate social media campaigns.

To apply for either course, please visit academy.bfbs.com.



CHLOE PETRYLAK

— FOUNDER OF CHLOE MAY WRITES —

Over the last eight years I have produced hundreds of thousands of articles, entertaining and educating audiences far and wide. The vast majority of these were written in fast-paced London offices for titles such as National Geographic Kids magazine and The Week Junior.

However, 2019 was the year in which this all changed and my familiar surroundings of a city office became a distant memory. I joined my wife on her overseas posting. Thus emerged Chloe May Writes - a communications service that creates, edits and proofreads content to help businesses effectively convey their message, raise brand awareness and increase sales.

Being able to choose where, when and who you work with is revolutionary. As many people would have recently experienced during the world's biggest working from home experiment, home-based jobs allow more freedom. Aside from the career opportunities, the things I particularly love about being home-based is that I have the flexibility to enjoy walking my dog whenever I like instead of rushing to fit it in before work, I can complete online courses such as #SMSpouses and, here's not forgetting, getting the laundry done in the background!

I've been lucky to have a career filled with highlights such as going on incredible press trips to the likes of Iceland, Norway and Slovenia. I also had the opportunity to interview various celebrities and experts, both in print and on camera, as well as prepare the footage for the magazine's website and YouTube channel.

Whilst working as a freelance communications specialist, I have had the pleasure of writing for Forces Network and other military titles. I have also had the chance to create a series of engaging and entertaining online animal quizzes for a trivia company as well as write and edit website content for a children's charity.

HOME WORKING TIPS

In the world of freelancing, sticking to a routine is paramount. Most people (well, before lockdown happened and the whole world was doing it) probably imagined that freelancers spent their days plonked on the sofa in their pyjamas. This couldn't be further from the truth. To ensure you run a successful business from home, it is essential to dress the part and have one space in your home that is just for your work. Of course, this doesn't need to be an entire room as who realistically - especially in this military life - has that kind of space to spare. Just a desk in the corner of a room would be perfect. Somewhere that you can comfortably sit at when you begin your working day and then leave behind once the day is done. Mentally, you need to create that separation in order to achieve something that resembles a work-life balance.

MORE ON CHLOE'S WORK

As well as working for various clients, Chloe also produces articles for her website - chloemaywrites.com, based on her passion for wildlife and the environment. You can also discover fun animal facts on her social media channels - just search for @ChloeMayWrites.





Introducing LOVE • Style • MAGPIE

By Jo Markwick

I've worked in jewellery retail for most of my career, mainly running my own business and a bricks and mortar shop. In the last seven years I have been focussed on jewellery styling and fashion, running an in-home and online boutique, offering style sessions in groups or one-to-ones? Finding this a much more satisfying way to connect with customers and managing to fit it in with our transient lifestyle!

"I love being my own boss and choosing how and when I work."

My husband is Serving in the Armed Forces and we move every 2-3 years, it was important to me to keep working for myself. Being there for our son, Jack when Paul is away, is a priority alongside earning and being a business woman in my own right!

Our challenging year with lockdown has meant adapting and changing what I can offer,

which has been fun and given me some more room to grow. I now offer virtual style sessions meaning I can reach my customers far and wide. I've expanded my Social Boutique I have recently launched my website www.lovestylemagpie.com

Bringing together clothing brands and fabulous accessories alongside Jewellery (from Park Lane Jewellery), my main aim is to always bring together high quality, capsule wardrobe pieces that you will wear time and time again! The brands I choose are not readily available on the high street and I work hard to find collections that you don't see everywhere. I have regular capsule collections launched within my Social Boutique for my VIP's then online. I have some amazing pieces from Mama Life London, Friendtex, UK, French & Italian brands that you will love.

You can gain access to my Facebook group: <http://bit.ly/LSM-StyleClub> or to shop



go to www.lovestylemagpie.com or Park Lane Jewellery: http://bit.ly/PLJ_Shopwithme

Introducing HeadFIT for Life

HeadFIT is designed specifically for the Defence community, providing 24/7 access to online self-help tools that can enhance your mood, drive and confidence, and help manage the stresses of everyday life.

We all recognise that feeling when our head is in the right place – the moments when we're feeling positive and confident about what we're trying to achieve, when we're on top of our game.

Most of us go the other way too. Everyone has thoughts, feelings and behaviours that don't really work for us or the people around us. At home and at work.

The fact is, our heads are active all the time. In any day we can feel excited, stressed, irritable, elated, up and down... it's all completely normal and goes right back to our earliest instincts.

What's more, the science now shows us that these instinctive patterns don't need to hold us back. By understanding how our thoughts,

feelings, behaviours and bodily sensations all interact, we can actually help rewire our brains to work better for us.

There's a range of proven, everyday tools and habits to help us with that. But a great start is to STOP and become aware of how you are responding to things.

The tools and techniques include breathing exercises, body posture and relaxation techniques that have been designed for everyone across Defence. Whether you are a new recruit, long-serving personnel, a veteran, civilian staff, serving in uniform or part of the RAF Family. The techniques are designed so they can be easily integrated into everyday lives.

This is the moment you come off autopilot, CHALLENGE what's going on in your head and, if it's appropriate, CHANGE the way you're thinking.

HeadFIT has been developed in partnership with The Royal Foundation's Heads Together campaign, the Ministry of Defence, Kings College London, with clinical advice from Dr Vanessa Moulton, and has been spearheaded by The Duke of Sussex.

Learn to check in with yourself and get into the habit of using the tools that are right for you simply go online to:
www.headfit.org



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ENVOY FORCE

IN THIS NEW FEATURE WE'LL BE ASKING RAF KIDS TO TELL US WHAT THEY THINK OF A HOT NEW BOOK... HERE THEY SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS ON *BLOOM* BY NICOLA SKINNER....

POLLY WILLIAMS, AGED 8

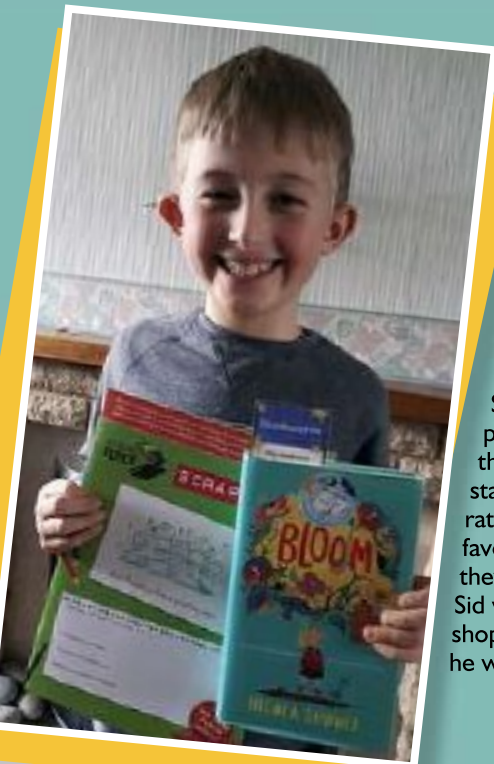
I was really excited to read this book and when it came I loved the illustration and bright colours on the cover. The main characters are

Sorrel and her friends Chrissie and Neena. The book reminded me of Jack and the Beanstalk because Sorrel had magic seeds which made strange things happen.

I have loved reading it as there are so many chapters, some I read to my mum and dad at bedtime. I tried to read a chapter every night. This fiction book was interesting and I loved the magical things that kept happening. I would recommend this book to my friends at school!



& READING BOOK CORNER!



OLIVER BARTLETT, AGED 8

This book is about a girl called Sorrel and her friend called Neena. They found some seeds at Sorrel's house. Sorrel and Neena planted some seeds in their heads and flowers started shooting out. I rate this book 10/10. My favourite bit was when they went to see Sid. Sid works at their corner shop. I like him because he was funny.

TAKE PART IN READING FORCE AND SHARE BOOKS WITH YOUR FAMILY

We post you books to share and chat about, together at home or over Skype or FaceTime if separated due to deployments. We'll also send you a scrapbook for you to fill with thoughts about the book, emails, letters, drawings, and photographs. Families say doing Reading Force is a good way to stay close, connected, and to keep communicating. Best of all, it's fun 😊

To receive your free special scrapbook and book, pick up a scrapbook from your children's school, HIVE, or go to the family page on the Reading Force website and register online: www.readingforce.org.uk

If your children would like to review books for Envoy's Reading Force Book Corner, please get in touch with Hattie: hattie@readingforce.org.uk - with your children's names and ages.

ELLA-ROSE STRINGER, AGED 10

Bloom is about an 11-year-old girl named Sorrel, whose patio cracked open and she found 'surprising seeds'. Sorrel and her friend Neena go through a wild adventure. Sorrel is usually a bright girl who listens to the rules (she is also asked by teachers who want to join the school, what the rules are).

The Author, Nicola Skinner worked as a copywriter and journalist before she visited an overgrown country which inspired her to write 'Bloom'. It is an extraordinary book with an unexpected ending. It was so good I didn't want to put it down. The book shows that if you keep your promises then no harm will be done and that Sorrel was a girl who wanted to do the best for her mum, no matter what happened. I give this book 10/10 and I really enjoyed reading it to my mum.



A FACEBOOK SUPPORT GROUP FOR PARENTS, RUN BY PARENTS

When our son joined the RAF two years ago he was the first member of our family to pursue a military career. At the time we had no idea what this would mean to us as a family and on returning home from RAF Halton after dropping him, his kit and the ironing board off, the reality of it all crashed down on us and we suddenly felt completely alone and isolated. This wasn't just a new job, a normal career; this was life changing for the whole family. We had no friends who knew how we felt and no one wanted to listen ("oh, it's just like going to uni"). Of course we were proud, but we also felt bereft, in shock, a little scared and very lonely. Desperately, we started hunting around on Facebook for RAF groups. Finding some helped us to cope and through them we found wonderful friends in other parents, who had been through it too and understood how we felt.

When they do come home, even if only for a few hours, we know how to make the most of every minute and treasure it.

Family life is different for us compared with non-military families - much harder, both logistically and emotionally. We must learn to accept that we can't see our children as often as we would like to, that when they need our help, we can't give it because we cannot be with them. We have to be even stronger as parents, standing distant watching them struggle. We have to adapt; often, rather than a reassuring phone call with them, or a comforting hug, we have to send a food parcel full of love instead, because it will be weeks or months before we can give the love and comfort that we long to give them. Missing them is part of daily living, the emptiness when they return to base is different to any other feeling and getting the whole family together at once is both rare and difficult to arrange. As parents we need support and we need each other, we are important members of the RAF family.

While there is a lot of support for personnel, spouses and children, there was nothing at all specifically for parents. I felt that as a group, we needed a forum where we could ask for and receive advice, pour our hearts out to one another and ask the questions that are too 'silly' to ask on a mixed group. We needed a place where it was ok to feel sad because we missed our son or daughter - and somewhere to laugh about the things that non-military friends just wouldn't understand. We also needed a place where we could share proud stories of our children's achievements, show photos and share general news - something non-military parents can do freely.

I thought that the best way to provide this would be with a secure Facebook Group. With the help of three other parents - Jaci McCloy, Barbara Armstrong and Tracey McCabe, all of whom have serving sons, plus the backing of the Federation through Caroline Woodward and Nick Crouch, the new parents-only group was born.

Since it launched last September, our membership has grown steadily and covers parents just starting with AFPO through to long standing RAF parents. The chat is friendly and wide-ranging (there is always someone who knows the answer to a question). We also have a growing number of reference topics including information about the various bases, BFPO info, kit lists for RAF Halton and Cranwell, hotel accommodation near bases, pastoral care, emergency contacts, acronymsplus many more.

We take security very seriously and when people ask to join we contact them via Messenger with a couple of questions. We also require all members to be friends with an admin on Facebook and once that is completed, the new member is welcomed into the group.



To find and join the group search: 'RAF Parents of Veterans, Serving Personnel and Recruits'



Alli Kay



Barbara Armstrong



Jaci McCloy



Tracey McCabe

As it is the parents who make the group what it is, we asked them to contribute with their thoughts. I wish I could include all of them, but here is a sample which we think says it all.

"Unless your child is in the forces you really don't understand how it feels to have your whole life ruled by others."

"The only place in my life where everyone truly understands what it is like ...the worries, last minute plan changing, deployment concerns, the separation."



"Best group on the internet without a doubt."

"No one understands what it's like for your child to pledge their life for Queen and country ...the group is such an amazing support to us all."

"It's great to see that I'm not the only one feeling the way I do ...Everyone understands and just gets it ...it makes a massive difference just knowing there is always someone there."

"It's a group that looks out for each other even though most of us have never met."



A proud family moment at a Graduation Ceremony, RAF Halton. ©RAF FF

"A confidential and safe environment to express our shared experiences as family of the current military community."

"As a mam I can take off the brave face mask and let my true feelings show."

"I honestly don't know where I would be without this group and some of the friends I have made in it."

"Most of us didn't expect our offspring to have upped and left still in their teens. It's been a great support and comfort to know we are all in it together."

"We love our page, always informative and supportive."

"(When my son was ill) the support and love I got was overwhelming and really helped get me through a tough couple of days."

"My first port of call when I have a question, a worry, something to celebrate ...It's also where I feel I can help others ...everyone just gets you."

"The affinity I feel with fellow members is like nothing I've felt before."



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Five Ways to Wellbeing

By | Padre Chris Hodder

A couple of years ago a friend of mine in ministry asked if we could meet up to chat about the "Five Ways". Initially I got excited and thought this meant she was going to buy me a burger, but once I had realised that she said "Five Ways" and not "Five Guys" I got over my disappointment and realised she was going to chat to me about something much more significant to my wellbeing.

What Ruth wanted to tell me about were the five common areas in life where we need to engage in order to improve our mental health and wellbeing – vitally important after the past few months of disruption to

the fabric of our national and social lives. Most of us are probably better at some of the five than others, but paying attention to all of them is a sure way of making us feel more positive and able to get the most out of life.

What are these "Five Ways"?

Well, they are: Connection, Physical Exercise, Learning, Giving and Taking Notice.

1. Connection

Good relationships are important for your mental wellbeing. We all need to connect with others, and positive relationships help build a sense of belonging and self-worth, provide emotional support and allow us to support others. Why not:

- Take time each day to be with your family - do you have a fixed time to eat dinner together?
- Arrange a day out with friends you have not seen for a while (when possible).
- Try switching off the TV to talk or play a game with your children, friends or family (even if online perhaps too?).
- Have lunch with a colleague – in the current climate of writing, that could be virtually (try it!).
- Contact a friend or family member who needs support or company.
- Volunteer at a local school, hospital or community group – it is not just good for your SJAR.
- Make the most of technology to stay in touch with friends and family.

2. Physical exercise

Being active is not only great for your physical health and fitness. Evidence also shows it can also improve your mental wellbeing by raising self-esteem, helping us to set goals or challenges and achieve them, and physiologically, causing chemical changes in your brain which can help to positively change your mood. Why not:

- Chat to a PTI about where and how you could get started.
- Download a couch to 5k programme.
- Join a sports club on base, or locally – it could be a team, leisure badminton, rowing, or why not take up a martial art, or yoga?

3. Learning

Research shows that learning new skills can also improve your mental wellbeing by boosting self-confidence and raising self-esteem. Humans are meaning making creatures, and learning can help you to build a sense of purpose. There are lots of different ways to bring learning into your life. You could:

- Try learning to cook something new.
- Try taking on a new responsibility at work, such as mentoring a junior staff member or improving your presentation skills. Talk to FDS; or Chaplaincies often run lots of courses on mental wellbeing, listening skills, stress management and the like.
- Work on a DIY project, such as fixing a broken bike, garden gate or something bigger. There are lots of free video tutorials online.
- Try new hobbies that challenge you, such as writing a blog, taking up a new sport or learning to paint, learning a language. It needn't be an academic course – but it could be. What about exploring your learning credits and what they could do for you?

4. Giving

Research suggests that acts of giving and kindness can help improve your mental wellbeing by creating positive feelings and a sense of reward, giving you a feeling of purpose and self-worth, and helping you connect with other people. Humans are social creatures, and most of us like to make a positive difference in the world. It could be small acts of kindness towards other people, or larger ones like volunteering in your local community. Why not try:

- Saying thank you to someone for something they have done for you.
- Asking friends, family or colleagues how they are and really listening to their answer.
- Spending time with friends or relatives who need support or company.
- Offering to help someone you know with DIY or a work project.
- Volunteering in your community, and that could be a COVID-19 support group or local hospital – or when we are all back to normal, it could be helping at a school, hospital or care home.

5. Taking notice

Paying more attention to the present moment can improve your mental wellbeing. This includes your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you. Some people call this awareness 'mindfulness'. Mindfulness can help you enjoy life more and understand yourself better. It can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges. I often think that children, with their natural sense of wonder, are much better at this than adults! We could learn from them. Can you take more time to enjoy the moment and the environment around you? Why not:

- Get a plant for your workspace if you can.
- Have a "declutter" day.
- Take notice of how your colleagues are feeling or acting.
- When time allows, vary your route on your journey to or from work or visit a new place for lunch.

Padre Chris Hodder



Taken together, all these 'Five Ways' help us build what I guess in the Chaplains Branch we would call 'Spiritual resilience'. If you look at how monastic communities patterned their lives, you can see lots of traces of this stuff in the kinds of 'Rule of Life' they engendered. 'Taking notice' for them was partly expressed in the daily offices they prayed at different points in the day, and held the mental and physical disciplines they were committed to in a coherent framework.

If you don't know where you should start with this, why not ask to see your

Padre and chat over a coffee about the Five Ways? You won't get a gourmet burger out of it – but you may be surprised at the ways you could grow and change your mental health for the better...

The mental health charity Mind also offers information about the five ways to wellbeing – find them here: www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/five-ways-to-wellbeing/

OP CONNECT -

RAF ASSOCIATION'S FOUR NEW EMERGENCY WELFARE PROJECTS MEET COVID-19 NEED

As the COVID-19 lockdown began in the UK, the RAF Association moved quickly to launch four emergency welfare projects supporting the RAF community.

Within days of the government announcement, the Association began individual welfare checks by telephone on more than 30,000 people known to be in high-risk categories. One couple in their eighties had health conditions that made it too dangerous for them to go out for provisions. Former air electronics officer Ken Topaz left the RAF on medical grounds in 1973 and his wife, Shirley, had just come out of hospital when the lockdown started.

“We don’t normally ask for charity help, but we had no other choice, given the circumstances. We’re very grateful.”

Shirley said: “We decided to stay put because we didn’t want to take any chances with our health. Unfortunately, after a fortnight we ran out of food and other essentials.”

With family and friends unable to leave their own homes or too far away to provide help, the couple sent out a plea to the RAF Association. Ken said: “We couldn’t believe how quickly [they] arrived.”

In addition to immediately changing its existing welfare operations the Association launched four new, highly focused services, under the banner of OP CONNECT:

- **Project OUTREACH.** A telephone outreach service, contacting high-risk individuals in the RAF community to check on their welfare, offer them ongoing telephone friendship from a regular volunteer and alert them to other support services.
- **Project HELPLINE.** A friendship helpline (0800 018 2361) that anyone in the RAF community can call if they are feeling isolated or lonely and want a friendly chat with someone who understands.
- **Project BAG DROP.** Volunteers are delivering vital provisions to the doorsteps of the most vulnerable or self-isolating members of our RAF community.
- **Project ENTERTAIN.** A daily RAF-themed live online entertainment programme which spans a wide variety of popular activities, from exercise and sing-a-longs to history talks and virtual ‘Brews’ which give participants the chance to chat with special guests. All the sessions can be seen at www.rafa.org.uk/operation-connect.



Association volunteer responding to requests for urgent bag drops in Humberside and North Lincolnshire.
© RAF Association.

Over 500 volunteers have so far stepped forward and been trained to support the emergency projects, as have over 270 of the Association’s local branches. More volunteers are still urgently needed to make outreach calls and to become telephone befrienders. Email friend@rafa.org.uk to offer your help.

The RAF Association has also launched an emergency fundraising appeal to ensure they are able to meet the increasing level of demand while normal fundraising events and collections are on hold: www.rafa.org.uk/get-involved/emergency-covid19-appeal

Rachel Huxford, Director of Marketing and Fundraising at the Association said: “The way that our RAF community has united with us to help our most vulnerable individuals is nothing short of inspirational. But we have a long way to go still, and the number of people needing our help is growing daily. We are determined to support every single person who needs us, for as long as it takes.”

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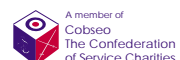
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RECOGNISING RESILIENCE

FOR RAF PERSONNEL AND FAMILIES

By | Lisa Hancock

“Resilience is that ineffable quality that allows some people to be knocked down by life and come back stronger than ever. Rather than letting failure overcome them and drain their resolve, they find a way to rise from the ashes” – Psychology Today.



Resilience is defined as the tendency to bounce back. It is a skill that is important to develop so we can become experts at handling life's inevitable ups and downs.

Developing emotional resilience is easier for some than others and the old-fashioned idea of 'manning up' is no longer considered helpful or productive. We need to leave these toxic, and quite frankly sexist, sayings behind and support people on their journey to become more resilient; it cannot be imposed with a simple instruction but is a process that starts with individuals understanding how and what they are feeling, and then it's about empowering them to take control over these feelings.

It's also about appreciating how resilient we already are in our lives.

It's easy to demonstrate that we all display impressive resolve in small everyday things. Recognising that we are already able to cope with small challenges allows individuals to build self-esteem and this forms the basis of changing their self-belief; a positive view of one's self then leads to greater confidence full stop.

At Big White Wall we are a member-led service so individuals can explore how they feel at their own pace, helping to identify their existing strengths, seeking recovery through courses whilst being able to talk and share with others in a safe, anonymous, online community. This allows an individual to feel more in control which is the foundation to becoming resilient.

If you would like to get some support then join Big White Wall, it's free to all serving members of the RAF, their families (16+) and veterans. You will find a supportive, non-judgemental community of anonymous members who post their thoughts and questions, you can interact as little or as much as you like. Our Wall Guides, who are trained mental health practitioners, are in the background 24/7 should you need them.

Join us at www.bigwhitewall.com

Living through COVID-19 with **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder**

Ex-serviceman Andrew Stevens explains how the support he received from the RAF Benevolent Fund allowed him to manage his obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and continue his job as a key worker delivering groceries in his community through the coronavirus pandemic.

In 2007 my career in the RAF was unexpectedly cut short and I struggled with my transition back into civilian life.

I joined the Royal Air Force when I was 18 years old, serving for seven years as a painter and finisher on Tornados based out of RAF Lossiemouth. I loved my job in the military, you're part of a tight community and a brotherhood.

You're told how to dress, what to eat, what to drink, where to live and everything is decided for you. I was made redundant in 2007 and that's when things changed for me.

Despite being successful in finding a civilian job, I became anxious and depressed and quite quickly things spiralled out of control. I began to worry about everything, my finances, my family, about my new job, my home. Eventually that worry turned into compulsion.

It started with small things like washing my hands. I would wash them twice to make sure they were clean and that I wouldn't get ill. But things escalated and before I knew it I was washing my hands four or five times and was still not happy. I would make the bed and if it didn't look exactly how I wanted it, I would start it all over again.

I began to avoid certain parts of the house and then eventually stopped going out too. I would spend hours at a time in the shower, trying to get clean. I wouldn't touch my food, I would pace around the house checking I had locked everything.

When I got home, I wouldn't go near my children. I know it sounds crazy, but I couldn't risk touching them. This went on for 10 years.

And it was at that point my wife intervened and booked me a doctor's appointment. Quite early on they diagnosed me with severe OCD.

I finally admitted I needed help and got in touch with the RAF Benevolent Fund, not really knowing if they would be able to help. What really sticks with me is the speed in which the Fund stepped in and offered support.

I questioned whether there was any point in me being here, I was ready to end things.

But the Fund's early and reactive support meant I didn't





have to ask myself these questions for very long and slowly the darkness lifted. The Listening and Counselling service they provided saved my life.

The support I've received has taught me how to manage my condition, and I'm pleased to say that I've been able to continue my job as a supermarket delivery driver throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Had I not received this help, I'm sure this would have been an incredibly triggering experience for me. Instead, I now feel confident and secure that I can carry on going to work, looking after my family, and taking care of my own mental health.

When I was in the RAF I was serving my country on the frontline, now I'm proud to be on the frontline again, supporting the keyworkers and the rest of the country as we battle this virus. If it wasn't for the Fund, I simply wouldn't be able to that.

As well as the Listening and Counselling service, the RAF Benevolent Fund offers relationship counselling, bereavement support, free access to mindfulness app Headspace, gambling support, and more.

You can learn more by about the support available to RAF personnel and their families by visiting www.rafbf.org/how-we-help



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IMMUNITY MARCHES ON ITS STOMACH

Comprised of serval organs and cells; the immune system provides resistance against infection, viruses and toxins. Although it does an outstanding job of protecting us against disease-causing microorganisms, occasionally our defences are outdone, and we fall ill. When this occurs, we must follow medical and government advice. Today this means practising physical distancing, self-isolation and proper personal hygiene.

However, we can do more! It was established in the early 20th century, that a victorious soldier requires 'good and regular nourishment' - our immune system is no different!

During times of stress or anxiety, our automatic response is to either comfort eat energy-dense foods or forget to eat due to a suppressed appetite. In such times it is essential to eat regularly and resist overindulging. The below tips will help maintain health.

Are you regular? As a nation, we're not consuming enough fibre. Fibre adds bulk to food, keeping us fuller for longer which helps to absorb toxins and ensure regular waste removal.

Top Tip: opt for whole grain varieties such as brown bread, rice and pasta. Where possible keep the skins on fruit and vegetables.

Taste the rainbow: Aim for 5 handfuls of fruit and vegetables per day (2.5 if dried). This will provide fibre and essential immune supporting nutrients such as Zinc which supports the production of white blood cells and Vitamin C an antioxidant which helps prevent cell mutation.

Top Tip: Opt for frozen, dried or canned (in natural juices), they are cost-effective and have a much longer shelf life!

It's Alive! Active cultures of bacteria are live microorganisms capable of withstanding the stomach's gastric juices. Once in the intestine, these microorganisms colonise the colon wall increasing the population of good bacteria and providing an extra protective barrier. Probiotics must be consumed daily for a full month to be effective.

Top Tip: Less is not more! Go for products which state the probiotic and quantity on pack i.e. lactobacillus or bifidobacteria. Quantities must be in billions.

Thank you NHS, key workers and volunteers for your hard work and dedication in our time of need!



Power of plants: It is unlikely you will need to increase your protein intake. However, protein is worth mentioning as it plays a crucial role in the production and replacement of healthy cells which may be responsible for fighting infections.

Top Tip: Increase your vitamin, mineral and fibre intake without compromising protein consumption! Choose plant-based protein such as soya products, pulses and grains. They are also easier to store and have a longer shelf-life

Tip top hydration: Poor fluid intake prevents the removal of toxins and reduces the volume of both blood and lymphatic fluids - the transport fluid for white blood cells. This puts pressure on the immune system. Keep hydrated and drink between 1.2L to 2L of fluids a day. Drinking little and often throughout the day helps.

Top Tip: Opt for no added sugar or sugar-free drinks where possible to avoid increasing calorie intake.

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Research Evidence for Real Life

Some people think that academic research is not relevant to their lives, but it can be used in many ways to inform and support decisions on different issues faced by all of us. Far from being something done by academics with no practical utility, much research in the military social field has very real applications to everyday life for the Armed Forces family and for veterans. The FiMT Research Centre offers free access to relevant UK and international research and a wide variety of networking tools to support anyone making use of it.

The research on the Veterans and Families Research Hub is easily searched and covers all the main topics that affect our community, such as education, health, housing and many others. This research helps to underpin and guide, with robust and relevant data, the work done by many of the organisations you can go to directly for help or support. If, for instance, you are working with the Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS) and the RAF Families Federation to support you with a school appeal for your child, you may wish to access research on education and Service children to add to your evidence.

TO START WITH, WHY NOT TAKE A LOOK AT THE SNAPSHOTS?

These are simple, lay language summaries of key research areas that take away all the academic jargon and provide key facts and evidence. If you need more detail, the Snapshots contain links to all the longer reports. The team can also help with finding the right research if you have any trouble finding it on the Hub; just get in touch.

As a research centre, we produce research and monitor research activity in this area globally, but we also get out and about, talking to Serving personnel, local government staff, NHS workers, and the many organisations and charities who support the Forces community. We do this to keep up to date with key issues affecting you and also to find new ways of getting research to those who can use it for the benefit it offers.

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The Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre (funded by the Forces in Mind Trust) is part of the Veterans and Families Institute for Military Social Research at Anglia Ruskin University.

For information

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Case study

Phil (not his real name), a serviceman is married to Tania (likewise), who was previously married to another serviceman. He has two children from his first marriage and Tania has one child from her first marriage. Phil is being posted overseas, and they are facing a custody battle as her ex-husband does not want him to take the children with them. Phil came to the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) Research Centre via its website, the Veterans & Families Research Hub (www.vfrhub.com) and the team signposted him to the latest research on Service children. Due to the evidence he provided to the family court, the decision made took into account the particular issues of service life and the impact on families.

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