

Tackling Serious Stress in Veterans, Carers and Families E-Bulletin

May 2019

University of Chester

Update from Principle Investigator, Professor Alan Finnegan PhD RN FRCN FAAN



Welcome to the inaugural Serious Stress e-Bulletin, which intends to provide updates from the Centre and AFCFT, and include information from all grant holders.

Time has moved quickly since the University of Chester's Westminster Centre for Research in Ageing, Mental Health and Veterans was commissioned to provide an independent evaluation of the initiatives funded under the Serious Stress in Veterans, Carers and Families Programme. To ensure this occurs, it is of paramount importance that the collected data is accurate, authentic, and reliable, so that the results improve the health and wellbeing of the Armed Forces Community.

Successful grant holders and delivery partners are responsible for the collection of standardised, valid and reliable information. The evaluation framework uses core questionnaires to capture key information (e.g. trends and risk factors) on entry and exit from the programme initiatives. Additional validated and reliable psychometric questionnaires will measure anxiety, depression, well-being, and alcohol use. This will help advance knowledge and understanding of the predisposing factors and the associated symptoms that resulted in veterans, carers and their family experiencing serious stress. Then there are additional questionnaires to determine cost-effectiveness and extra-financial value measured by health, environmental and social outcomes.

I would like to reaffirm my personal thanks to the grant holders who hosted my visits, I thought the meetings went very well. It was great to listen to the enthusiasm and passion for this work. Questionnaires, the participant information sheets, and consent forms, were shared with grant holders before the site visits, and I thank everyone for the feedback which helped ensure consistency in the interpretation of any questions sets. The meetings also provided an opportunity to discuss the eligibility criteria and transmission within an independent evaluation that is anonymous and confidential. Unfortunately, Tagsa Uibhist decided not to progress with their proposal, leaving seven successful UK grant holders. The visit schedule is in Table 1.

Ser	Date - 2019		Programme	Location
1	21 March	WWTW	Northern Care Co-Ordination Project (NCCP)	Manchester
2	22 March	CAIS	Change Step- Next Steps	Llandudno
3	26 March	Veterans 1 st Point	Live Life – Veterans & Families	Edinburgh
4	08 April	Ely Centre	Veterans, Support. BT35 to BT94	Fermanagh
5	09 April	Inspire	Recovery Together	Belfast
6	15 April	Solent NHS Trust	Portsmouth Military Wellbeing Alliance	Portsmouth
7	23 April	Wigan Borough Council	Unite, Inspire, Achieve Programme	Wigan
8	NA	Tagsa Uibhist	Tagsa Uibhist	Cancelled
Table 1. PI visit schedule with Grant Holders				

The visits revealed a number of common themes:

Extant data monitoring: Grant holders have extant systems for evaluating and monitoring their work, and are naturally very keen not to lose that surveillance. However, additional evaluations will skew the results and impact on the AFCFT evaluation. The Centre therefore intends to distribute regular bench-marking reports highlighting activity, demographics and other relevant information. This would provide the grant holders with the information they require; all be it in an aggregated form.

Longitudinal Study: All grant holders identified the benefits in continuing data collection after the participants have exited the Serious Stress programme. The aim being to collect and analyse repeated observations (via questionnaires) to identify improvement / deterioration over time. This could be six and twelve months after exiting the programme. I have forwarded this recommendation to the AFCFT and will update grant holders once a decision has been reached.

Coding - delivery partners: Grant holders will often utilise multiple delivery partners for a single participant. This presents a challenge to identifying which intervention was the most effective. The Serious Stress projects will not be a linear process, which from a coding aspect causes numerous problems. I would advise that grant holders should either: a) code the first delivery partner offering support, or b) the delivery partner offering the most support. The written feedback in the exit questionnaire will go some way to addressing this by providing a narrative to capture the complexity of the intervention. It would also prove beneficial to capture the views of staff and participants through focus groups or interviews. Again, this is a suggestion that is currently being considered.

The AFCFT Serious Stress evaluation has ethical approval from the UoC Faculty of Health and Social Care Research Ethical Committee. Please be aware that this is for the evaluation only, and not for the interventions. If grant holders require ethical approval, then we would be happy to guide on how this can be

achieved. The Centre has obtained copyright permission for all of the validated questionnaires but only for the AFCFT commissioned evaluation.

Entry Questionnaire: A key point from the site visits was that the timing for the completion of the entry questionnaire must make sense to the grant holders, delivery partners, and most importantly the participants. That clearly on occasions will not be the first meeting, as the person's health and immediate support must be the clinical priority. Completing the questionnaires can be accomplished once the participant is feeling better and hopefully has had some of the stressors in their life resolved. I do not believe this will have a negative impact on results.

Exit Questionnaire: Similar flexibility is required with the exit questionnaire. Grant holders may provide extended maintenance / safeguarding interventions that are provided after the Serious Stress programme to ensure on-going wellbeing. Therefore, the participant should complete the exit questionnaire on the completion of the specific Serious Stress element. The Centre appreciate that they will continue to be supported, so the message is that the grant holders should not wait for participants to be heading out of the door to ask them to complete the exit questionnaire.

A key element in this programme is to build collaborations and support appropriate networks. To promote this, a symposium for grant holders to discuss progress and share views will be held at the University of Chester on 24 and 25 March 2020. You will be made very welcome in our beautiful city.

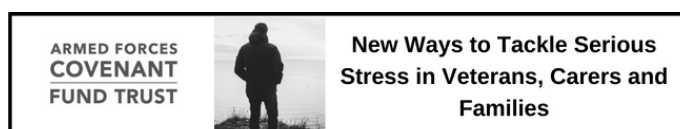
Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust

Update from the AFCFT

More than £4M was awarded during 2018/19 under the Tackling Serious Stress in Veterans, Carers and Families Programme. We were delighted to be able to support seven worthy projects offering innovative solutions to providing the much-needed support required by this cohort. From complimentary interventions and trialling new methods of support, to addressing gaps in provision and ensuring a collaborative approach to service delivery; each project we funded offers an exciting opportunity to address the complex and often severe issues and challenges affecting some members of the ex-Service community.

This bulletin offers a useful insight into the ongoing development of the organisations we supported across the UK. It is a great opportunity to learn about funding in action, and we encourage you to absorb the details of the excellent work being undertaken. While the projects funded under this programme continue to develop and gain pace, other programmes designed to support veterans, Service families and the Armed Forces community more widely are also available.

The Positive Pathways Programme is the latest pot of money for Armed Forces charities to access to offer outdoor activities to veterans that increase their mental health and wellbeing. As opposed to intervention and service delivery, it is about offering opportunities for veterans to get out and active amongst peers and possibly led by peers too.



Similarly, our Veterans' Community Centre programme continues in earnest, with the first awards having now been made. We're strongly encouraging veterans and those who support them to help identify the places that exist to offer a place to meet and socialise, day or night; and consider what could be done to improve these spaces, be it repair work, improved facilities, a new roof or better access. Money is available to help revamp these well-used centres, to ensure that veterans continue to have somewhere to go in their local community to spend time amongst peers.

Find out more about all of our latest funding opportunities on our website, www.covenantfund.org.uk

Grant Holder Updates

Solent NHS Trust



- Project governance has been established, headed up by a joint board with the sister project - Positive Minds (Portsmouth wellbeing house)
- A wide range of stakeholders have been engaged with to enrich the offer to Veterans
- Evaluation methods agreed with the University of Chester
- Recruitment of the Quick Response Force (QRF) volunteers is underway and showing good levels of interest
- A training programme for the QRF is in development
- Solent Recovery College curriculum model for Veterans developed and ready to pilot with the first cohort from June with a full rollout from the new academic year starting in September
- First draft of the Standard operating procedure for the offer to Veterans has been produced

Walking with the Wounded



WWTW are in the set-up phase of the Northern Care Coordination Partnership (NCCP). We have:

- Recruited our Portfolio Manager (project manager of the NCCP). Simon Lock will join us on May 27th
- Recruited our Support Care Coordinators, Julie Wanless and Jill Darwent, who will join us in June
- Organised key training for new starters including; Conversations with Vulnerable Adults (Samaritans Course) and Outcome Stars training, with Outcome Stars being one of the key tools we will use to measure success
- Created our first flyer to promote the programme, including new branding
- All delivery partners have been reengaged and most have signed the new delivery partner agreements ready for our first referrals
- We have a local launch planned in each location (June 10th for North East and 20th June for North West)
- We have also reached out to the other recipients of Tackling Serious Stress grants and are coordinating a visit for the Northern Ireland Inspire Wellbeing team to come over and visit our sites in Manchester and Gateshead, as well as making the introductions to the Wigan Council team who are already working with WWTW

CAIS

- CAIS have successfully had their first participants start the programme with 64 referrals to date
- The first questionnaire has been returned
- A successful first meeting of delivery partners has been held
- The Governance panel has been elected
- All Peer Mentors have now been recruited and will be in post by June



Wigan Council

Wigan have been recruiting staff and meeting with delivery partners to sign the agreements:

- There are approximately 10 referrals at present for the programme
- They expect the first participant to enter the programme in the last week of May



University Staff Project Team



Dr Alan Finnegan

Professor of Nursing and Military Mental Health, and Director of the Westminster Centre for Research

Colonel (Ret'd) Alan Finnegan's military career included appointments as: Commanding Officer at the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine, MOD Nurse Consultant Advisor in Military Mental Health and Defence Professor of Nursing. His overseas deployments include Iraq, the Balkans, Afghanistan, Africa and four years in Northern Ireland where he was OIC of the Stress and Trauma Clinic within HQNI. On retirement from the Army, he joined the University in 2016.

Dr Lisa Di Lemma

Senior Researcher – Veterans Projects

Lisa is a psychologist and her research interests focus on health and cognitive processes, behaviour change and cost-effective interventions. Currently, she is a post-doctoral researcher at the University, and the Tackling Serious Stress in Veterans, Carers and Families project is one of her main focuses.



Lottie Ainsworth-Moore

Project Administrator – Veterans Projects

Lottie has a strong background in working with serving personnel, their families and veterans in previous employment with military charities and volunteer work. She is also an Army wife of 10 years.

Dr David Sacree

Researcher

David served for 27 years in the British Army, spending 16 years with the special-forces. The experience gained from various appointments in commissioned rank and his personal experience of integrating back into civilian life, provide him with valuable insight to the range of challenges faced by serving personnel, veterans and their family members.



Lauren West

Administrative Assistant

Lauren studied at the University of Chester before gaining employment at the Westminster Centre for Research. She has good links to the military community and assists a number of military forums including being Secretary for the Cheshire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Committee.

Events, News & Information

Symposium

The Tackling Serious Stress Symposium will take place on the 24th and 25th March 2020 in Chester for all Grant Holders. More detail about this exciting event will be provided closer to the time.

Award Win

At the Educate North Awards in April, the Westminster Centre for Research and Innovation in Veterans' Wellbeing won the External Relations Team of the Year. The Centre has subsequently developed an impressive educational model and research profile. These impact positively, not only on military veterans' health and social support, but also that of the wider Armed Forces Community. The Centre is now connected into an extensive UK and international network of collaborations. The award was accepted by Professor Alan Finnegan, Faculty of Health and Social Care.



Useful links

Westminster Centre for Research in Ageing, Mental Health and Veterans	www1.chester.ac.uk/westminster-centre-research-and-innovation-veterans-wellbeing
Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust	www.covenantfund.org.uk/
Solent NHS Trust	www.solent.nhs.uk/
Walking with the Wounded	walkingwiththewounded.org.uk/Home/Index
CAIS	www.cais.co.uk/
Wigan Council	www.wigan.gov.uk/index.aspx
Veterans 1st Point	www.veteransfirstpoint.org.uk/
The Ely Centre	www.elycentre.com/
Inspire	www.inspirewellbeing.org/