



# Monmouthshire Armed Forces Forum Minutes

Friday, 11<sup>th</sup> December 2020 – Online via Microsoft Teams

Present	Joe Skidmore – MCC, Catrin Cribb – MCC, Lisa Rawlings – AFLO, Tom Hall, Capt. David Bell – RMRE, Cllr. Laura Jones – MCC, Rebecca Green – SSAFA, Mark Reed – Help for Heroes, Gino Parisi – ABUHB, Stephen Boswell – SSAFA, Kelly Osadare – RBL, Jinty Morgan – Hire A Hero, Stephen Sullivan – Hafal, Andy Jones – StoMP
1. Welcome & Introductions	JS welcomed the attendees to the meeting and the group introduced themselves. JS thanked everyone for their continued efforts and their commitment throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. Apologies	Caitlin Woodland – Regional School Liaison Officer (Gwent), Sarah Masterton – DWP, Sadie Baldwin – AFF, Emma Perrin – AFF, Capt Matthew Cleaver – 1 Rifles, Damon Rees – Veterans NHS Wales, Kirsty Gronnow – Poppy Factory, Alison Griffiths – Help for Heroes, Sarah Stokes – HIVE, Finola Pickwell – Hafal
3. Minutes of previous meeting & matters arising	The previous meeting took place in December 2019 and as such, the group felt it was not relevant to review these at this time.
4. Update – Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer	<p>From Lisa Rawlings (AFLO):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Welsh Government revising the AFLO’s KPI’s to ensure relevancy and workstreams for Pan Wales</li> <li>▪ Workstream activity – Suicide Prevention, Hubs in each LA</li> <li>▪ Gwent Armed Forces Newsletter will be converted to an All Wales newsletter and organisations are encouraged to submit articles</li> <li>▪ There will be a Wales Armed Forces Covenant website co-ordinated by AFLO’s</li> <li>▪ Carried out Armed Forces Covenant Training via Microsoft teams and 125 persons have attended from Oct-Dec 20. Bespoke sessions available to staff, other public bodies and third sector organisations</li> </ul> <p>From the WLGA/Welsh Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Training package and E-Learning is currently being updated in consultation with AFLO’s and an outsourced company</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ KP ad£120k grant provided to 13 charities/providers to tackle loneliness and social isolation in the Armed Forces community (Community &amp; Relationships)</li> <li>▪ Commitment to develop a Wales Resettlement Guide to bring together all relevant information on support available in Wales. (Employment / Finance)</li> <li>▪ Working with WLGA, AFLOs and partners, updating the Wales training package for frontline staff to increase awareness of the Armed Forces community and support available. New website potential. (Public perception &amp; understanding)</li> <li>▪ Developing a Veteran employer event for 2021 in Wales to promote the skills of Service personnel, veterans and families. (Employment / Ed / Skills)</li> <li>▪ Investment in the capacity of Veterans NHS Wales - interim funding of £85,700 provided to cover the staff costs from October 2020 to 31 March 2021. Veterans NHS Wales business case under consideration (Health &amp; wellbeing)</li> <li>▪ Working with Business in the Community and the Scottish Government, produced the Capitalising on Military Family Talent toolkit. (Employment)</li> <li>▪ Established an Armed Forces Prosthetics forum to monitor the delivery of the Veterans Prosthetics policy. (Health and wellbeing)</li> <li>▪ £50k funding invested in training for prosthetics in Wales following feedback from BLESMA and the limb centres. (Health and wellbeing)</li> <li>▪ Investment in the Armed Forces Liaison officer roles to continue their work (Coordination of Veterans' services)</li> <li>▪ Participation in the Veterans Railcard and 'Great Place to Work for veterans' initiative working with the UK Government.</li> </ul>
<p>5. Update – Current Grant Applications</p>	<p>LR has applied for 2 grants under the Force for Change Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund and will have the outcome on Feb '21. She has also supported local schools to apply for the same grant.</p> <p>LR has advised the new AFCT grant priorities will be issued in Mar/Apr 21 and would encourage more applications from Gwent.</p> <p>Applications for the Positive Pathways programme has now closed.</p>
<p>6. Guest Speaker – Catrin Cribb</p>	<p>Community Response to Covid-19</p> <p>MCC responded to the Covid pandemic by structuring a multi-departmental team to work directly with communities and those offering their support in their communities. We were able to link new volunteers into existing volunteer groups with safe recruitment practices and offers of DBS checks and appropriate training – plugging the gaps in our more rural communities proved the biggest challenge but we were able to utilise displaced MCC staff to cover these gaps.</p> <p>Our team were also the direct contact for those experiencing difficulties with accessing shopping/prescriptions etc. Working with communities and volunteers to match vulnerable with those offering support within the local areas. This linked appropriate volunteers up with local people needing a helping hand and in the process creating lasting relationships and many of these informal support mechanisms are still in place.</p>



ABUHB Ffrind I Mi – linking up befrienders with those needing support. Using the support of students to assist – put out the call for veterans but very little response rate.

7. Maindiff Court Hospital

Damon Rees from Veterans NHS Wales would like to create a Remembrance Garden in Maindiff Court Hospital in Abergavenny. This would be for Veterans who are accessing the Veteran Service as part of Veterans NHS Wales in ABUHB.

The reason for the garden is to allow the Veterans a quiet space to contemplate and reflect when visiting the hospital prior to and after receiving psychological therapy from the Therapist's at the Hospital. Damon would like to use gardening as a holistic approach so that the Veterans develop the garden themselves as a way to embrace alternative therapy and develop coping strategies for military service attributable to mental health difficulties.

Initial costings for the garden are approx. £2000; this is for 3 Tommy Silhouettes, a Remembrance Bench, and building materials for the concrete plinth for the bench, flowers, and flowerpots. This is a reserved costing for the first instance. The plan is then to allow the Veterans to develop the garden themselves using their creativity, teamwork and planning. This will lead to a positive impact on their treatment, building on their confidence, self-belief and communication skills. It could also be an alternative place for therapy sessions for those who would prefer this type of space.

**ACTION: Any partner able to offer support, whether through physical labour/interested individuals to develop the garden, or monetary means, please contact Damon Rees**

8. Update – Partner Organisations

**Mark Reed – Help for Heroes**

The charity found itself using a lot more money than was available in the reserves. Required staff being furloughed – redundancy notices (lost a third of staff – 100 personnel) – knock-on effect on the way the service will deliver (in wales 12 staff to 5). HQ unusable at present due to flooding

**Stephen Sullivan – Hafal**

In the latest round of the Positive Pathways programme, the Trust has awarded more than £1 million to support veteran-focused projects.

Part of the Veterans' Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund, the Positive Pathways programme supports activities that get veterans out and active – and this latest round is no exception. There will be a final round of awards made under the Positive Pathways programme in February 2021. So far, 145 veteran projects have been supported across the UK.

**Andy Jones – StoMP**

Project finishing end of March – a continuation of champions could attend future meetings. Usk has a large proportion of veterans (approx. 25 out of 240) Community payback scheme for veterans – looking for opportunities for this work

**Stephen Boswell – SSAFA**

Covid policy remains unchanged – no face-to-face meetings or casework unless absolutely necessary. Casework nationally down but steadily rising – SSAFA Forces line are almost back to last year's number of calls

All other SSAFA services are continuing –

- Ssafa mentoring for service leavers
- Adoption service
- Gurkha support
- Support for families with special needs or disability
- Military wives Choir

Veterans in the Justice system service is suspended for entering the Prison but casework, where needed, is continuing when people leave the prison.

**Jinty – Hire A Hero**

One member of staff had to be made redundant – Gold award this year.

**Tom Hall – Blesma**

Continuing to support in Wales. Limbless veteran/loss of limb veteran – a whole range of support available for life.

**Capt. David Bell – RMRE(Militia)**

Due to COVID Restrictions, the Regiment is following the stay at Home / Work from Home advice. This has resulted in a significant reduction in communication especially F2F meetings and schedule meeting being cancelled or curtailed. We are currently conducting TEAMS Meetings with our Military/MoD/Gov partners and Zoom meetings with other partners. We have made great progress in alternative communications methods especially with the Royal Engineers Association (REA). We continue to engage with our MCC partners. A visit to Pen-Y-Graig Woodlands Centre was conducted to see what engineer support could be utilised. We are still looking at some developments but think a community grant may be worth exploring. REA provided a donation to Usk prison and has a desire to further develop this link. The REA Branch President is engaged with Homes for Veterans, so again the collaboration links remain strong in the Monmouth area.

	<p>It is appreciated that with the continuance of COVID that we have not held many of the meetings to allow the AFF/AFC's to thrive as much as they would wish. We all look forward to better times and improved communication and introducing new methods to achieve on par with our previous commitments.</p> <p><b>Sarah Stokes (Chepstow HIVE) (email update)</b>  Due to the current COVID19 situation, Chepstow Army HIVE is currently working from home with the same service in place, available during office hours to answer queries by email and a network of HIVE Blogs. To ensure that everyone receives the very latest information including official Army COVID19 advice and guidance to Serving Personnel and their Families, please encourage everyone to sign up using the 'Follow by Email' link on the Blog. We abide by the Data Protection Act and you can withdraw your permission to receive our emails at any time by using the unsubscribe link found at the bottom of every update email you receive. My contact details during this time are: <a href="mailto:chepstowhive@armymail.mod.uk">chepstowhive@armymail.mod.uk</a> / 07976 698527 / <a href="http://www.chepstowhive.blogspot.com">www.chepstowhive.blogspot.com</a></p> <p><b>SSCE Cymru</b>  SSCE Cymru has launched the findings report from the parent/carer survey (2020), which can be <a href="#">accessed here</a>.  New regional school liaison officer for Service children in East Wales, covering Monmouthshire - Caitlin Woodland. Based in Newport City Council and working in partnership with Supporting Service Children in Education in Wales (SSCE Cymru). Caitlin will be building on the work that Emma Ashmead carried out previously, who members of the meeting may know.</p> <p>SSCE Cymru will be distributing £200,000 of funding for Service children, based on the ongoing data collection. Caitlin will be with Monmouthshire in the coming months to help identify gaps in provision and key areas that will benefit from the funding.</p> <p>Caitlin is looking forward to working with members of the forum in the future. Please get in touch if you have questions or would like to hear more about her work – <a href="mailto:Caitlin.woodland@newport.gov.uk">Caitlin.woodland@newport.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>9. Guest Speaker – Fighting With Pride</p>	<p>Caroline Paige and Craig Jones MBE (<a href="#">Fighting With Pride: The LGBT+ Military Charity</a>)</p> <p>Fighting With Pride (FWP) is a new military charity, created on the 20th anniversary of the complete lifting of the ban on LGBT+ service – the 'gay ban'. We are here to support LGBT+ Veterans, serving personnel and their families, particularly those who were affected by the 'gay ban', ultimately lifted on 12th January 2000. Before then, thousands of LGBT+ service personnel were removed or forced from service and abandoned, after serving with pride. In the years ahead it is our aim to restore the military covenant and bring this community back into the military family.</p> <p>We are working with Veteran supporting organisations to build capacity for LGBT+ Veteran support, to recognise their service and help resolve the challenges they face in their lives beyond military service.</p> <p>FWP is a 'lived experience' LGBT+ charity, supporting those seeking help and a resource for those who seek to help them.</p>

10. AOB	On 7 <sup>th</sup> December the Armed Forces Covenant annual report for 2020 was published: <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/armed-forces-covenant-annual-report-2020">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/armed-forces-covenant-annual-report-2020</a>
11. Date of Next Meeting	Future dates will be scheduled for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ June 2021</li><li>▪ December 2021</li></ul>