

**FORCES
CHILDREN
SCOTLAND**



A FORCE FOR MEANINGFUL CHANGE:

**OUR CO-PRODUCED APPROACH
TO INFLUENCING**



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ABOUT FORCES CHILDREN SCOTLAND

FORCES
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SCOTLAND



We support children and young people from armed forces and veteran families across Scotland.

We work directly with children and young people from this community to amplify their lived experience and help them to overcome unique challenges to mental health and wellbeing, education and learning, isolation and loneliness, and much more.

We provide life-changing experiences which help them to expand their horizons, develop new skills, build confidence and make friends through shared experiences, camaraderie and common purpose.

We support armed forces and veteran families to overcome financial hardship and enable their children and young people to dream big, realise their potential and pursue positive futures.



INTRODUCTION

In August 2022 we launched a three-year strategic plan, which unveiled six priorities for supporting children and young people. One of these priorities is 'Influencing', recognising the responsibility we have as an organisation to make sure that children and young people from armed forces and veteran families are listened to and that their unique lives are better understood, with professionals equipped to support them and policy developed with their experiences in mind.

Feeling unheard by people in positions of power can be common for many groups of children and young people. By enhancing our influencing activity at local, regional and national levels, we hope to help decision-makers hear the voices of this community and better recognise their needs.

Our strategic plan outlines some of the actions we will take when it comes to influencing to achieve meaningful change:

- Shape policy through sharing an evidence base of research and lived experience
- Provide a vibrant learning platform through our website
- Develop supportive learning and development opportunities for all
- Launch compelling content which changes public attitudes
- Campaigning.



To deliver on this and more, we decided it was important to define our unique influencing approach. We took space and time to understand **why** we want to influence change, **how** we will go about achieving change, **which** tools we will use and **what** we will focus on.

Throughout this project, we sought to explore different types of influencing and the successes and challenges associated with trying to affect sustainable change for more than 12,500 children and young people from armed forces and veteran families across Scotland.

A strong human rights-based approach has emerged from this work, with attention to participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment and legality threaded throughout.



CO-PRODUCTION IS AT THE HEART OF OUR APPROACH

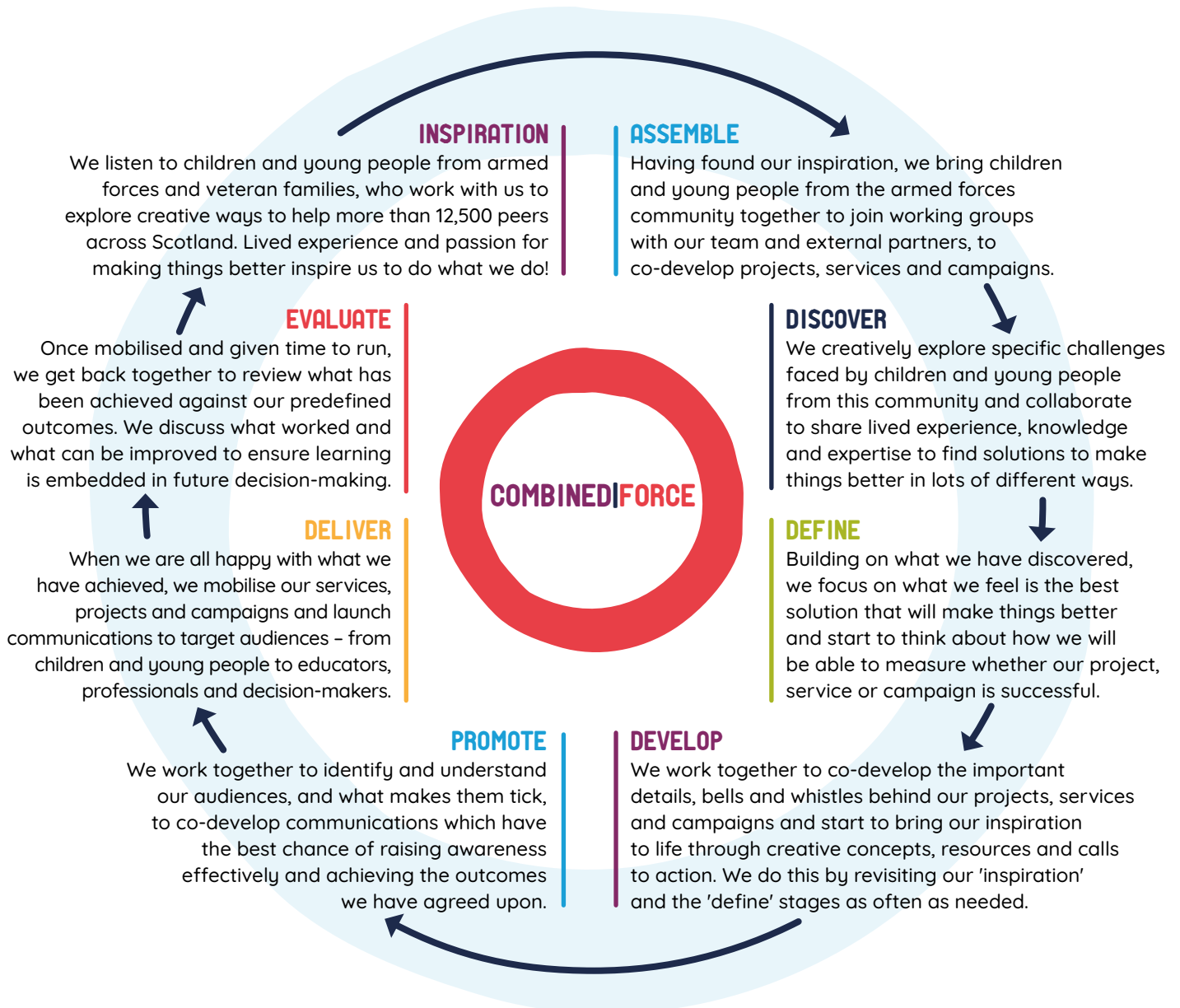


In developing our strategy to influence positive change, we used tried and tested methodologies which utilised our unique co-production approach and sought to learn from the successes of others.

COMBINED|FORCE

We strongly believe that children and young people should have their say on things that matter most to them – and in the transformational power of participation.

Our unique process of co-production, called Combined|Force, means our approach to influencing has been designed in a way that balances the lived experience and creativity of young people with the expertise and passion of our staff.





DESIGN COUNCIL DOUBLE DIAMOND MODEL

Core to our Combined|Force approach is the Design Council's Double Diamond model, encouraging a planned but adaptive method of exploring big questions with young people and staff, working towards clear actions or outputs. In addition to leaning on the Double Diamond model, our commitment to taking a trauma-informed approach means we champion the five core principles of safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness and empowerment in our work.



SOCIAL CHANGE: THE SHEILA MCKECHNIE FOUNDATION

We also used the Sheila McKechnie Foundation's Social Change project and tools to design our approach to influencing. The Social Change project holds a wealth of information and guidance for civil society organisations trying to secure meaningful, sustainable social change.



Read on to explore how each of the above has helped shape our unique **co-produced approach to influencing.**

WHY DO WE WANT TO INFLUENCE CHANGE?



Four core elements underpin **why** we want to increase our influence to benefit children and young people. These are:



Children and young people from armed forces and veteran families across Scotland have the right to be heard, with too many reporting a feeling of being hidden, unheard or misunderstood in policymaking and practice.



We do not know enough about this group and how being part of the armed forces community shapes childhood. Research suggests we need to consider their experiences of education, mental health, relationships, trauma and transitional moments such as moving with their parents from military to civilian life.



The adults around children from armed forces and veteran families need to know more about their unique lives, which means educators and professionals, across military and civilian sectors, need to feel confident and equipped to support them at the right time.



Policy surrounding children and young people from armed forces and veteran families in Scotland falls to both the UK Government and Scottish Government, meaning it is possible for this community's rights to fall through the gap.



We hope that by increasing our influence and addressing each of these elements, children and young people from armed forces and veteran families will feel increasingly heard, understood, respected and represented.

Meaningful change

A familiar place where things stay the same...



HOW WILL WE INFLUENCE CHANGE?



The behaviours we employ are important to both being successful and being proud of our work. Forces Children Scotland is a values-driven organisation and we hold ourselves accountable to the promises we make.

We explored the Social Change Project's *Twelve Habits of Successful Changemakers* to understand the behaviours and principles shaping the success of other values-driven influencing activity. We then worked to adapt these habits to reflect the expectations we have of our own work. We will ensure the following list of habits is present in all our influencing activity. It will also shape how we evaluate our success.



1. We give power to lived experience. We work collaboratively with children and young people to explore their experiences, identify what needs to change and define what solutions could help them and others like them.



2. We balance data, research and lived experience. We understand the importance of a robust argument for change and that's why we lean on various sources, however, we are always led by lived experience.



3. We look at the big picture. We appreciate that people might experience things a little differently and that meaningful change is complex.



4. We take a leap of faith. We aren't afraid of taking risks but always make sure we work to understand if the change we seek is right and will lead to the world we want.



5. We test the water before we start to swim. We will embrace the challenge of trying new things by piloting ideas before we implement them, warmly welcoming and listening to feedback from all our stakeholders.



6. We don't procrastinate on making change. While we need to ensure our goals are right, we always remember that children and young people from armed forces and veteran families are waiting for the change to happen.



7. We work with others, not against. We know that meaningful, sustainable change does not happen in a vacuum, so we will always ensure collaboration is present throughout the design and delivery of our influencing activity.



8. We balance our need for money with ideas and creativity. We strive to be driven by our mission, focusing on the evidence and what our young people feel is important, then finding the resource to help us turn these bright ideas into exciting new realities.



9. We will never be linear, we will always be squiggly. We know that the journey to meaningful change might require us to pause, reflect and evaluate before we continue our influencing journey, even if this means we have to change our approach sometimes.



10. We say it how we mean it. We create snappy, bold and vibrant communications that are clear and consistent to help push our influencing message as far as possible, to all stakeholders – from children to duty bearers.



11. We play to our strengths. We stay true to our organisational purpose and our unique position within the sectors in which we operate, making sure we embody our mandate fully, bringing in those with the expertise we do not have, whenever needed.



12. We use what works. We know what influencing tools are within our specialism, how to use them and at what time to do this, always learning from others as we go.



13. We are in it till the end. We don't give up and we persevere until we see the change we want.



WHICH TOOLS WILL WE USE TO INFLUENCE CHANGE?



Many tools can be used to effect change but careful consideration of what tools are used and when is critical to success. As a small third sector organisation, it is vital we use our resources wisely, ensuring our influencing of relevant sectors and institutions is trusted, useful and brings independent criticality when needed.

To help define the tools we will use most often to influence change, we explored successful examples of influencing, noting the tools that were used and how they were deployed. We used this analysis to consider our own organisational tools, creating a succinct list of those we believe are within our reach and have the power to effect sustainable change. These are:

1. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Engaging children and young people, their families and the professionals around them.

When we talk about the armed forces and veteran community, we mean the whole community. Although it is our role to give primacy to the voices of children and young people, all perspectives are essential to achieving systems change and we engage widely with this community to create the conditions for strong community participation.

2. DIRECT ADVOCACY

Connecting the voices of those with lived experience to those in power.

We are uniquely positioned to facilitate dialogue between children and young people from armed forces and veteran families and people in positions of power, and we recognise the importance of ensuring these voices are heard and understood throughout any and all lobbying activity we undertake.

3. CO-PRODUCED CAMPAIGNING

Developing bespoke campaigns on core issues in partnership with children and young people.

When developing campaigns, we do so alongside children and young people from armed forces and veteran families, ensuring our collective knowledge shapes powerful messaging.



4. RESEARCH

Contributing our own data to the research base and sharing new and emerging research with others.

We know the importance of a strong, credible evidence base when it comes to identifying challenges and their solutions and so we will help profile emerging research from a range of disciplines and sectors. To contribute to this evidence base, we also have a responsibility to share the knowledge gleaned from our frontline services and participation work.

5. LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

Providing supportive environments for professionals to learn from the experiences of children and young people.

We offer safe spaces for professionals to get together and consider their practice from a children's rights perspective. Our learning offer uses a range of methods, such as practice sharing, training and coaching, recognising learning from implementation science around what works in driving meaningful practice change.

6. COMMUNICATIONS

Designing informed, engaging, and creative communications.

Successful influencing requires effective communications methods and strategies to reach the right people, in the right way, from social media presence to press engagement. Our unique communications approach embraces the power of storytelling across a range of creative methods, including digital tools such as blogs, podcasts and films, each conveying complexity in plain language while being rooted in our organisational values.

7. THE LAW

Using the law to educate, for accountability and in accessing justice.

Providing rights education for children and families, having space to highlight where law and policy are not being implemented, supporting children to access justice, using parliamentary powers and seeking changes to legislation when necessary. We recognise the power of the law but also our role in ensuring it is realised effectively and evolves as required.

The **participation** of children and young people from armed forces and veteran families is our most vital tool. To recognise this and to help embed a human rights-based approach within our influencing activity, 'participation' runs throughout each of these tools and no tool will ever be used without considering how the conditions can be created to ensure the inclusion of children and young people and their views.

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

Many children and young people from armed forces and veteran families thrive in what is a strong community, often filled with opportunity, travel and traditions. In addition to these experiences, however, are unique challenges. It is these challenges that our influencing activity is interested in.

To help determine what influencing goals and objectives would be included within our co-produced manifesto, we undertook an intensive but fun analysis process in three parts:

PART ONE

We identified the sources best placed to tell us what issues children and young people from armed forces and veteran families might face. Sources included academic research, civil society reports, media articles and Forces Children Scotland's organisational evidence, which included the voices of children and young people.

We then analysed this evidence base, highlighting the themes that emerged frequently, culminating in a core list of 'problems' to solve.



PART TWO

Once we had our agreed list of 'problems', we used the evidence base and our expertise to design solutions, learning from good practice around the world. We tried hard to use systems thinking when designing solutions, not only highlighting need for investment or training but considering attitude change, law change and wider systemic barriers.



PART THREE

By this stage we had identified problems and solutions but knew we had to develop how we presented them to external audiences. We shaped our 'call to action' for each one, ensuring we provided context, the challenge in front of us, and the action that could be taken to make this change a reality.



The following manifesto contains the outcome of this work across five main themes:

1. A STRONG EVIDENCE BASE

2. UPHOLDING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

3. POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

4. A THRIVING EDUCATION

5. SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE

Each theme presents our campaign brief, summarising the evidence base, our influencing goal and the calls we believe will help achieve this.



A FORCE FOR MEANINGFUL CHANGE



OUR CO-PRODUCED MANIFESTO

THEME 1: A STRONG EVIDENCE BASE

The collection of data about children's experiences is integral to designing a world that supports their childhood and helps them thrive. The monitoring of data collected about children also helps identify their experiences of inequality and ensure their rights are upheld – a critical component of any government attempting to embed children's rights (Berry et al, 2022).

In Scotland, we know work is being undertaken to improve our data collection behaviours and this is being done with children's rights at the forefront (Data for Children Collaborative). However, there is still much to do to change the way in which data is collected in Scotland, with experts identifying the gaps that exist and the impact of this on tackling inequality (Diamond, 2021).

There is a lack of data collected on the lives of children in armed forces and veteran families and, therefore, a lack of understanding about their outcomes in Scotland, leading to challenges in developing evidence-based policy and practice that is reflective of their evolving experiences (Together, 2023). This lack of data collection and research into their specific experiences also contributes to the feeling some children and young people have that they are forgotten about when it comes to policymaking.

[I want] the Government to know what kids whose dads/mums are in the forces feel and to hear them."

- Forces Children Scotland participation group member

Steps have been taken to address the data gaps and build the picture of where children from armed forces and veteran families are educated across Scotland (MacLeod et al, 2021). This research evidences the possibilities that exist with tracking the child's engagement with the public sector through the collection of data, and how it can highlight gaps in policy or implementation challenges. Information about how children interact with public services in Scotland becomes even more critical in the context of current global security and the impact this will have on the increased mobility of armed forces families across the UK and beyond.

Beyond data collection and increased Scotland-specific research, the evidence base must be enhanced by inclusion of the voices of children and young people from armed forces and veteran families, helping Scotland to understand their lives and co-produce policy and practice solutions. Children and young people having their voices heard is a human right and critical to designing solutions to the barriers they face. Crucially, it will also help address the feeling of not being heard that so many in this community express (Selous et al, 2020).

Scotland must now consider the steps that can be taken to build a stronger evidence base about the experiences of children and young people from armed forces families. Beyond better understanding their experiences and views, collecting robust data will also help Scotland to ensure that the rights of this community are upheld and that policies created to improve their lives are implemented fully, such as the Armed Forces Covenant Duty (2022). Through data collection, robust research and a commitment to listening to the voices of this community, we can be confident in our ability to uphold their rights and fulfil Scotland's ambition of being the best place in the world to grow up.





INFLUENCING GOAL: Scotland's design of policy and practice relating to children and young people from armed forces and veteran families will be informed by a combination of administrative data, robust research and the lived experiences of this community, to ensure their needs are met, early and effectively.

CALL #1:

The Scottish Government should consider how national data collection, including the collation of administrative data, can help Scotland understand the outcomes of children and young people from armed forces families and how they interact with public services, especially across health, housing and education. This should include consideration of how families can be supported to declare their armed forces identity.

CALL #2:

The Scottish Government and UK-wide research councils should invest in research looking at the experiences of children and young people from armed forces and veteran families in Scotland, focusing on mental health, education, relationships, development and upholding their rights.

CALL #3:

The Scottish Government should invest in the participation of children and young people from armed forces and veteran families, ensuring inclusion of their voices in policymaking and recognising their experiences as an often lesser-heard community.

THEME 2: UPHOLDING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Feeling unheard by powerholders can be common for many groups of children and young people. For some, though, their relationship with the state can create a further power imbalance, deepening this feeling of being hidden. For children and young people from the armed forces community, this imbalance has the potential to be enhanced by the scale of state-led decision-making that determines their childhood journeys, such as moving schools according to the posting of a serving parent(s) or increased stress or anxiety associated with parental deployment. This lack of agency is recognised as having the potential to cause detrimental impact to the child's educational experience, among other issues (McCullough et al, 2018).

Scotland has taken the world-leading step of committing to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law. Importantly, action to protect children's rights in Scotland comes at a time when there is a real threat to the protection of human rights across the UK, with proposals to repeal the Human Rights Act 1998. Affording strengthened legal protection to children's rights in Scotland will go some way to protecting against the regression in human rights standards elsewhere.

When it comes to children from armed forces and veteran families, Scotland must consider the unique shape of their childhoods within the armed forces community to understand fully if it is doing everything possible to protect their rights. Children within this community often experience high levels of mobility, meaning they can move around the UK and beyond, repeatedly, throughout their childhood due to the role of a serving parent(s) (Godier-McBard et al, 2021). Likewise, the very nature of service can cause separation between child and parent during deployments or other military-related events (McConnell et al, 2019).



Politicians need to know.”

- Forces Children Scotland participation group member

Furthermore, because of the reserved status of 'defence', children from this community are subject to the determination of both the UK Government and the Scottish Government in a way that many of their civilian peers are not.

While education, health and housing are devolved policy areas, the experiences of children from the armed forces community remain highly influenced by defence decision-making. The Armed Forces Covenant and its associated Duty (2022) go some way towards strengthening protections for this community, but clarity is required over how this will be implemented in Scotland and how it interacts with the future of children's rights.

It is vital that we better understand the realisation of rights for children and young people from this community. Core to this is consideration of the implementation of their rights, monitoring how they are upheld and their means to access justice should their rights be at threat. Clarity about how Scotland will protect against any potential disruption to the fulfilment of rights for children and young people from armed forces and veteran families is needed urgently, ensuring they feel included in a rights-respecting Scotland.





INFLUENCING GOAL: All children and young people will grow up in environments which seek to protect, respect and fulfil their human rights, ensuring their wellbeing, development and dignity is not adversely impacted because of their place within the armed forces community.

CALL #1:

The Ministry of Defence and the Scottish Government must conduct Child Rights Impact Assessments on any policy which has the potential to affect children from armed forces and veteran families, and consider steps they will take to mitigate any impact on the child.

CALL #2:

The Scottish Parliament to use its powers to understand the impact of children and young people from armed forces and veteran families being subject to both Ministry of Defence and Scottish Government direction, and to scrutinise if the Scottish Government is doing enough to ensure their rights are sufficiently protected.

CALL #3:

The Scottish Government must publish a strategy detailing how it will protect the rights of children and young people from armed forces and veteran families and implement the Armed Forces Covenant Duty, co-produced with children and young people, parents/carers and professionals.

CALL #4:

Further and higher education institutions must equip future education, health and housing professionals with knowledge about their legal duties under the Armed Forces Covenant Duty and the experiences of armed forces families, including focus on the rights and needs of children and young people.

CALL #5:

Professionals should undergo Continuing Professional Development (CPD), co-produced with young people, giving them the knowledge and tools to support with the various experiences associated with military life, including transitions, deployment and parental death or injury. This is especially important for those in education, housing and health fields.





THEME 3: POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

All children have a right to good health and access to health services, including for their mental health (UNCRC Article 24). The Scottish Government (2017) states: “Our vision ... is of a Scotland where people can get the right help at the right time, expect recovery and fully enjoy their rights, free from discrimination and stigma.” Yet the mental health of children and young people has received increasing attention in recent years due to increasing need and limited resources, especially following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Children and young people can have very positive experiences due to being part of armed forces families, with recognition of the resilience this life can build, their experience of travel and the strong sense of community within the armed forces. In addition to celebrating the positives, it is important that we do not forget the unique challenges children from this community can face, much of which can affect their mental health and wellbeing.

Deployment is a common feature of life for many armed forces families, with the serving parent assigned to serve in locations around the world for varying periods of time. Deployment can be a difficult time for children and young people to process the separation from their parent. Younger children with deployed parents may feel more anxiety and feel the physical absence of their parent, while older children can experience concern about their safety (Children’s Commissioner for England, 2018).

“I’m scared they won’t come back.”

– Forces Children Scotland participation group member

Beyond deployment, non-operational separation can mean that the serving parent is away from their family during the week and may only be able to return for weekends or short amounts of time. Parental absence, such as ‘weekending’, can result in children and young people experiencing anxiety and confusion (Paradis, 2014). Research has shown that this can result in younger children being more dependent and tearful due to separations from their serving parent (Gribble & Fear, 2019). Research shows that the longer a deployment goes on, the occurrence of mental health challenges rise for children and young people (Godier-McBard et al, 2021).

When it comes to accessing services, children and young people from armed forces families may face a tougher time gaining mental health support due to their highly mobile lives (Selous et al, 2020). The Armed Forces Covenant Duty legally obliges healthcare providers to take into account the sacrifices made by armed forces families and ensure no disadvantage is experienced, yet we know that children and young people from this community can still face being placed at the bottom of NHS waiting lists following a service-related move (Selous et al, 2020).

Scotland must consider what needs to be done to fulfil a child’s right to health and the commitments under the Armed Forces Covenant. It is important that children and young people from armed forces and veteran families have their unique circumstances understood and for decision-makers to review current policy and practice to make sure that this community have the right support at the time it is needed.





INFLUENCING GOAL: Children and young people from armed forces and veteran families must be surrounded by people who understand their unique lives, who are equipped to provide the right support at the right time, such as during deployments, and who can divert to well-resourced, specialist mental health and wellbeing interventions in a timely manner.

CALL #1:

The Ministry of Defence must review existing parental support initiatives to help ensure whole families feel supported and equipped with their mental health and wellbeing, particularly during key military events such as deployments and transitions.

CALL #2:

In realising their duties under the Armed Forces Covenant, Scottish health boards must commit to maintaining a child's place on NHS waiting lists following a service-related move to or within Scotland.

CALL #3:

The Scottish Government's next Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy should reflect the specific needs of children from armed forces and veteran families, acknowledging responsibilities under the Armed Forces Covenant and recognising the impact being in this community may have on children and young people, especially during key military events such as deployment and transitions.

CALL #4:

The Ministry of Defence and Scottish Government must invest in the provision of early intervention mental health and wellbeing supports for children and young people located on military bases and available across the whole of Scotland, preventing the need for medical interventions and ensuring this early response understands the unique contexts in which this community live.



THEME 4: A THRIVING EDUCATION

Education is a human right and pivotal in a child or young person's life (UNCRC Article 28). Scotland has a unique education system which strives to ensure that all children and young people not only succeed as learners, but also as confident, responsible citizens.

However, children and young people from armed forces and veteran families encounter unique challenges when it comes to their education. The often highly mobile nature of armed forces life can mean that children move between education institutions and systems. Given that the curriculum differs widely between even the home nations, children can find themselves either repeating subjects or missing them entirely (Children's Commissioner for England, 2018).

“Between Scotland and England, the systems are different, so we have to catch up with loads of topics/work.”

- Forces Children Scotland participation group member

Such disruption can also lead to complications with course choices and exams, poor transfer of information between schools, difficulty in identifying additional support needs and a lack of continuity in additional support for learning (ASL) provision. In addition to these practical issues, high levels of mobility can also pose challenges for children and young people in terms of their social and emotional development and wellbeing (McCulloch et al, 2018).

In addition to mobility, coping with the deployment of a parent can have a range of impacts on a child's education. Increased levels of stress and worry adjusting to parents' departure and return, increasing caring responsibilities and potentially coping with parental death or injury all have the potential to impact on a child's engagement with education (McCulloch et al, 2018).





"I get told off in school for being tired but they aren't aware of why I am tired."

- Forces Children Scotland participation group member

The Scottish and UK policy landscape does go some way to consider these needs. The Armed Forces Covenant Duty places a legal obligation on education authorities in Scotland to ensure no disadvantage is faced because of armed forces life. Furthermore, in Scotland, children and young people with serving parents are recognised as a group that may have additional support needs in education (Scottish Government, 2017). However, evidence suggests that such policy is not always implemented as intended due to the lack of awareness about who our armed forces families are (Macleod et al, 2021). Our work with children, families and professionals tells us that the needs of armed forces pupils are not fully understood and their status within the ASL framework is not always recognised.

While educational outcomes of children and young people from armed forces and veteran families in Scotland are largely unknown, the wider evidence base does suggest that fewer children and young people from armed forces families go on to attend university than the general population (McCulloch & Hall, 2016).

There is a clear and evident need that the challenges they face must be addressed if Scotland is to fully uphold their right to an education and ensure no disadvantage is faced because of their place within the armed forces community.



INFLUENCING GOAL: Children and young people from armed forces and veteran families must be educated and supported by people who understand the unique lives they lead and who are equipped to provide the right support at the right time, such as during deployments, and who can provide tailored, supportive additional support to ensure their education is not adversely impacted due to being part of the armed forces community.

CALL #1:

Alongside pupils from armed forces and veteran families, Scottish schools should co-produce their whole-school approach, detailing how education staff will support children during military-related events such as deployments and when transitioning between schools, developing local solutions that might include appointing Armed Forces Children's Champions, 'deployment passes' that allow children to request support easily, optional weekly guidance meetings to discuss how they are coping, peer support groups, whole-school awareness raising and using the Thriving Lives Toolkit (SCiP Alliance).

**CALL #2:**

The Scottish Government should strengthen implementation of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 by supporting schools to assess and collect data on the additional support needs of learners from armed forces and veteran families, raise awareness of the ASL framework and its relevance for this community, and commit to investing in support for those pupils who have experienced education disruption.

CALL #3:

The Ministry of Defence should invest in additional educational support for children and young people from armed forces and veteran families who have experienced a significant amount of disruption to their learning due to frequent moves linked to the postings of a serving parent(s).

CALL #4:

The four UK nations should design and implement a robust information transfer system within education which ensures that the right information is passed along with a child when they move schools and communities because of the posting of a serving parent(s). This information transfer must include the voice of the child, any safeguarding concerns and full information about any additional support needs.

CALL #5:

The four UK nations must review the UK-wide policy which determines student funding for many armed forces families based on the location where the serving person originally signed up to the military, with a view to redesigning an inclusive but flexible policy which does not lead to disadvantage for children and young people from armed forces and veteran families.



THEME 5: SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS TO CIVILIAN LIFE

When the time comes for serving personnel to leave active service, it is a big moment for the whole family (Selous et al, 2020). During this transition, families might have to think differently about housing, health, education and finances as they move from military to civilian life. While many families smoothly transition into civilian life and thrive, embracing a newly shaped identity, others face challenges (Heaver et al, 2018).

Moving to civilian life is not only a logistical and administrative change. For children and young people in armed forces families, they can experience the same feelings as their parents throughout this transition – confusion, disruption and, ultimately, a loss of identity which is significantly shaped by the employment of their serving parent(s) (Children’s Commissioner for England, 2018).

Many veteran families speak proudly of their continued role within the armed forces community once they leave active service but we know that, for some, their identity will inevitably shift. For children, the move to civilian life can mean less access to services enjoyed by children and young people with serving parents (Heaver et al, 2018). Likewise, moving to civilian life will sometimes require a house move, with families sometimes leaving Service Family Accommodation and geographical communities that have a high number of armed forces families within the population. Such experiences can result in children and young people feeling isolated and distant from their armed forces identity.

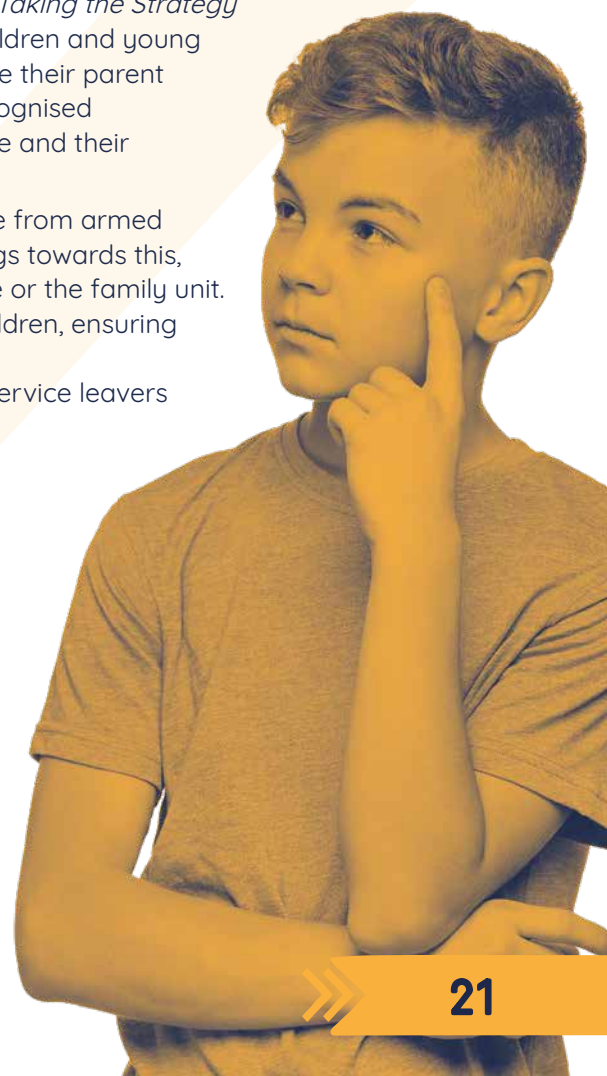
Importantly, the Armed Forces Covenant was designed to include veterans and their families. We also welcome the Scottish Government’s recognition of the whole family’s role in the transition to civilian life, as stated within the *Strategy for Our Veterans: Taking the Strategy Forward* (2022). To help build on this recognition and to help ensure children and young people feel prepared, supported and welcomed into their new lives once their parent leaves the armed forces, it is vital that families know their service is recognised and that they have rights and entitlements which recognise their service and their new identity.

Gaps remain in our knowledge about how children and young people from armed forces families experience the transition into civilian life and their feelings towards this, with much existing research focusing on the service leaver, their spouse or the family unit. More needs to be done to understand the experiences and views of children, ensuring Scotland is better equipped to support them at this critical moment of transition, fulfilling the ambition to be “the destination of choice for service leavers and their families” (Scottish Government, 2020).



It’s not like moving from one job to a new job. It’s changing your lifestyle, friends, home, everything.”

– Forces Children Scotland group participant





INFLUENCING GOAL: When their families move to civilian life, children and young people from armed forces and veteran families will feel prepared for the change, will understand where to seek support, if required, and will feel accepted into civilian life while feeling able to maintain their armed forces community identity.



CALL #1:

The Ministry of Defence should ensure that planning and support for families leaving active service with the Armed Forces starts early and prior to decision to leave, allowing adequate time for the child to understand the change, have their voice heard within the planning process, ultimately feeling better prepared for what lies ahead. Special consideration of support for the families of Early Service Leavers, those experiencing medical or administrative discharge or in the situation of injury or death, must also consider the child's needs specifically.

CALL #2:

The Scottish Government's next Veterans' Strategy must be informed by young people, families and the workforce, including a section outlining a commitment to the experiences and needs of children from armed forces families, detailing what support should be expected as the family leaves active service and how they will raise awareness about this community.

CALL #3:

The Scottish Government must invest in Scotland-wide service provision, such as mentoring, youth work and mental health and wellbeing support tailored to supporting children and young people when the serving parent leaves active service and the family moves to civilian life.

CALL #4:

As part of their Armed Forces Covenant commitment, local authorities should create 'welcome packs' for children and young people entering civilian life, to ensure they know what opportunities still exist for them within the Armed Forces community, as well as introducing them to new opportunities within the civilian community.



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If you would like to read our campaign briefs with full referencing, please get in touch at admin@forceschildrenscotland.org.uk





Thank you

To explore partnership opportunities with us, please contact our Chief Executive Officer Laura Falconer at laura.falconer@forceschildrenscotland.org.uk

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in linkedin.com/company/forces-children-scotland

ForcesChildrenScotland.org.uk

Forces Children Scotland
c/o The Melting Pot
15 Calton Road,
Edinburgh EH8 8DL

Email us: admin@forceschildrenscotland.org.uk
Scottish Charity Number SC038722