

IT'S NOT JUST THEIR JOB, IT'S OUR WHOLE LIVES

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What it means for children's rights when they are from an armed forces family

Special Thanks

We would like to thank all the children and young people who helped us make this report. They came from Leuchars Primary School, Firrhill High School, Colinton Primary School, Queen Victoria School, Scots Corner Youth Group, and other places in Scotland. We would also like to thank the eight young people spent two days with us and lots of nights online to tell us about what they wanted to be different about their rights.

We talked to over 160 children and young people, aged of 8-19 years old. We have used their words and we also wrote stories with them that represented many children's lives. There are 5 composite stories in the report. That means the stories are not real people but have been written with young people to show what happens in their lives.

Our special thanks to Rubie for bringing our composite stories to life through her wonderful animations.

Some of the names of the children are their own and some are the names they chose to keep their own name private. For the children who used their own names, they really wanted people to know that it was their experience.



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A MESSAGE FROM FORCES CHILDREN SCOTLAND

Hello! Forces Children Scotland cares a lot about what children like you think. We listen to your ideas because they're important to us. In this report, we want to show everyone what you think is important so they don't forget about you.

Protecting Your Rights

We believe all children should grow up in places where their rights are respected, and they feel safe and happy. We know many children from forces families do well, but some don't always get their rights considered. This report will explain why it's important for everyone to make sure your rights are always protected. You should also have a way to get help if your rights are not respected.

Listening to You

We made this report based on what you told us. Your ideas on how to make life better for you are really important to us. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and experiences with us. We want to make sure everyone hears your voice in this report.

“Have a voice, we aren't heard on things that affect us” Kai

The Most Important Thing

From everything you've told us, the most important thing is that all rules, choices, and messages should think about what you need and your rights. It shouldn't just be about what's good for your family. You want every decision that affects your life to have thought about you.

Meg Thomas

Deputy CEO and Policy Lead

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WHAT IS HAPPENING JUST NOW IN SCOTLAND WITH CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Human rights are super important for everyone, including more than 12,500 children and young people from armed forces and veteran families in Scotland.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The UNCRC was made because children need special protections for their rights. As children grow up and become more independent, the way their rights are supported needs to change too.

The UNCRC is a set of rules to make sure children get all their rights. They explain the basic things countries must do to give children what they need to keep them safe and let them be involved in decisions.

This report looks at how the rights of children from armed forces families are affected in three areas: protection, services, and participation.

The four guiding UNCRC principles

Every right in the UNCRC should be understood with these principles in mind.


The right to life, survival
and development


Respect for the views
of the child


Non-discrimination


The best interests
of the child

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IMPORTANT NOTE FROM THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (CRC)

The CRC says that children often can't make a strong case for what they need. So, the people making decisions need to be extra careful to consider what's best for children. If we don't focus on children's interests, they might be forgotten.

A Rights-Based Approach for Children from Armed Forces & Veteran Families

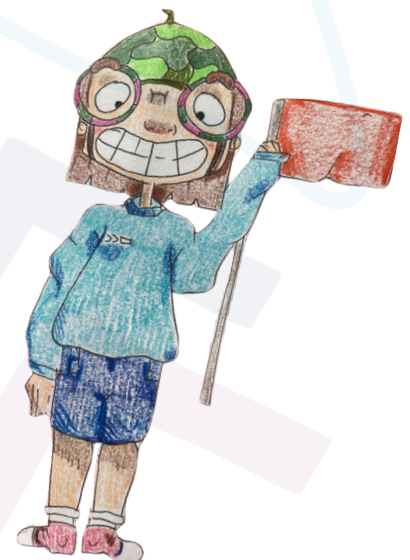
Even though the UNCRC doesn't specifically mention children from armed forces families, all its rules apply to them. These children might have a higher chance of their rights not being fully supported.

Unique Experiences

Children from forces families have parents who work in different parts of the military and in different jobs. They have different experiences, like moving to new places, having a parent go on deployment, or transitioning out of the armed forces. These experiences affect each child differently. They are diverse in many ways, such as age, gender, ethnicity, disability, and more. This means their needs and challenges will be different too.

Understanding Their Lives

The UK and Scottish Governments need to understand the unique childhoods of children from armed forces families to protect and support their rights. The Children's Commissioner in England found that the parents' military service greatly influences their childhoods. These children often move a lot, and they might be separated from their parent for long periods because of military duties.



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Taking a Rights-Based Approach

To make a positive difference in the lives of these children, we need to respect them as individuals with rights. It's important to help children understand and claim their rights and to ensure that adults know their responsibilities to support these rights.

Listening to Children

A key part of a rights-based approach is listening to what children have to say. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) surveys military personnel and their partners about their experiences, but there isn't a way to hear directly from the children. Without this, it's hard to know if the actions taken are really helping them. If we get it right for each child, we also help their parents, and everyone connected to the armed forces.



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LAWS TO HELP CHILDREN FROM ARMED FORCES FAMILIES

Scotland is working hard to make sure all children have their rights protected. The UNCRC Incorporation (Scotland) Act 2024 and the proposed Human Rights Bill are important steps towards making Scotland a better and fairer place for children.

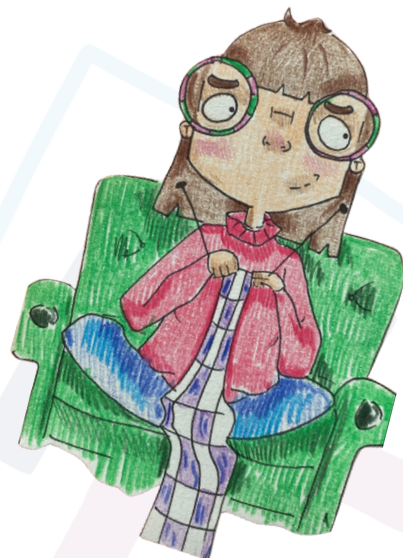
What the Law Says

Article 4 of the UNCRC says that governments must use their resources as much as possible to support children's rights. This means that plans to help children from armed forces and veteran families need to be included in budgets and policies at all levels of government. This will help make sure these children get the support they need.

The Armed Forces Covenant

The Armed Forces Covenant is already in place to support these children, but with the new UNCRC Act, we need to know how the UK Government, Scottish Government, and Local Authorities will protect their rights without any interruptions. The UK Government and the MOD are not required to follow the UNCRC Act, and many decisions affecting these children are made by them.

The Act will only cover laws made by the Scottish Government, so won't include decisions made by the MOD. This means these children might not get all the legal protections from the Act, but we hope they will still benefit from the positive changes it will make to how everyone thinks about children's rights. This report will suggest ways the UK Government and MOD, as well as Scottish Government and Local Authorities can do more to help.



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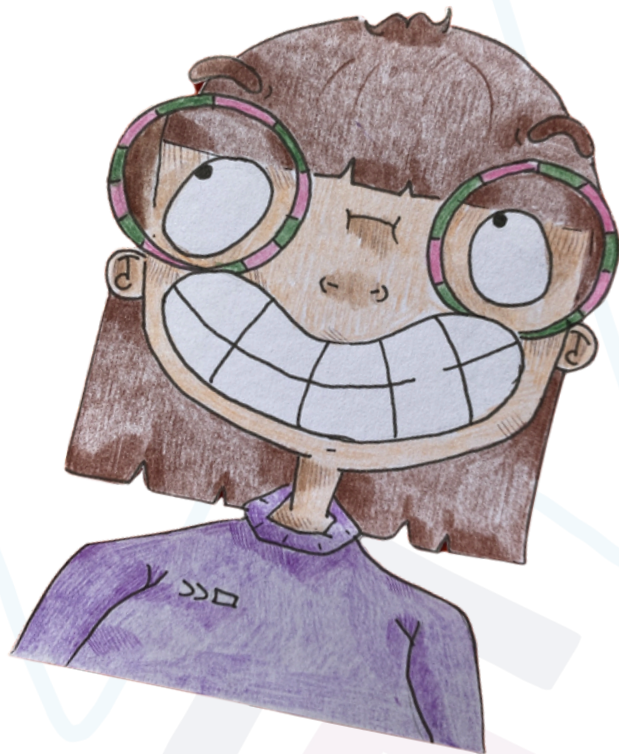
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What the Scottish Government Can Do

The Scottish Government must do everything it can within its powers to protect the rights of children from armed forces and veteran families. This includes making changes in areas like education, and healthcare.

Local Authorities' Role

Local Authorities in Scotland have a big role in supporting forces children. They need to follow both the UNCRC Act and the Armed Forces Covenant Duty. This report will show where local authorities need to do more to make sure these children's rights are protected and supported.



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HOW DATA HELPS CHILDREN FROM ARMED FORCES FAMILIES

Collecting information about children's experiences is super important for making a world that supports them and helps them grow. Good data helps us understand their lives and makes sure their rights are protected.

Why Collecting Data is Important

The UNCRC says it's not enough just to collect data; we need to use this information to see how well we are supporting children, find challenges, and create better policies.

Missing Data for Forces Families

Right now, we don't have enough information about children from armed forces and veteran families in Scotland. This makes it hard to create good policies and services to meet their needs. For example, the Scottish Government doesn't collect specific data about these children's school results, even though some may need extra help with learning. This lack of data makes it harder to develop policies that truly meet their needs.

Feeling Invisible

When there's no data, these children can feel forgotten about in policies and strategies. For example, the Armed Forces Family Strategy and other reviews don't focus on children, just families. Since many people leave the forces early because of the impact on their families, it's important to have policies that consider children's needs too. This can only happen if we have the right data about their experiences.

What Needs to Happen

The CRC's report in 2023 asked the UK and Scottish Governments to collect and analyse more data about children in tough situations. This should include those from armed forces families.

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Scotland needs to take steps to understand these children's experiences better. Collecting good, detailed data will help ensure their rights are upheld and that policies to improve their lives are put in place.

Both the Scottish and UK Governments should look at how national data collection can help understand how to get things right for children from armed forces families. This includes health, housing, and education. Families should be encouraged to share their armed forces identity so we can better support them.

By collecting and using data effectively, we can make sure children from armed forces families get the support and recognition they deserve.



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RIGHTS TO PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN FROM ARMED FORCES FAMILIES



What Are Protection Rights?

Protection rights are there to make sure children are safe from anything that might harm them. These rights are mostly about protecting children from actions by adults and institutions. Important protection rights include:

**Article 16 -
Protection from
having privacy,
home, or messages
interfered with
unfairly.**

**Article 9 -
Not being
separated from
parents.**

**Article 2 -
No
Discrimination.**

**Article 3 -
Making sure all
decisions about
children are made
with their best
interests in mind.**

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Challenges for Children from Armed Forces Families

Children from armed forces families often face challenges to their protection rights because of their parent's military service. Some of these challenges include:

Feeling discriminated against: This can happen in schools or communities.

Decisions about parents' jobs: Sometimes decisions about their parent's employment don't consider what's best for the children.

Being separated from a parent: Long periods away from their parent, with little or no contact.

Privacy issues: Living on a military base or having their messages to their parent checked or changed by the Ministry of Defence (MOD).

In short, children with parents in the armed forces often deal with challenges to their protection rights that no child should have to face.

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My mum is in the Navy and works on the submarines. She has done this my whole life, and it's all I know. I am so proud of her because you know she is making people's lives better.

It isn't always easy though. I have had to move a few times now, though not as often as some of my friends who have parents in the army. Every time I move, **it means leaving friends and schools and starting again somewhere else.** This can be exciting, getting to know somewhere new and meeting new people, sometimes being the new person makes you interesting.

But **it can be hard making new friends** when they know you come from a forces family. They assume that you will be moving again so don't want to make the effort to get to know you or they already have lots of friends they have known for years. They sometimes make fun of me as the new person and because the only thing they know about me is that my mum is in the Navy, they use that.

They make war jokes, say my mum is scary and likes to kill people, and they tease me about not having a mum when she is away. Noone understands what it feels like when your parent is deployed. Before she goes, you know she is about to be deployed but you don't know exactly when. You spend the whole time waiting and then when it happens it happens so fast.

”



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The longest she has been away was 7 months and **that time she missed my birthday and my school show**. It feels like the Navy never thinks about how it might affect me and my younger brother and sister and as a family we don't get all the support we need.

I get some support from school and because there are lots of navy children, they understand what I need. My friend who is the only forces child at her school doesn't get anything. A lot of the time, **it feels like we are just expected to get on with it**.

As a family, **we can send mum a 120-word message each week**. This message is read and sometimes has things taken out by the MOD. **We must be careful** not to say anything that will upset my mum or anything that is too happy that it might distract her from her work. If we do, it might not be passed on.)

We know that what we write will be read by other people, not just her, so we don't really say anything too personal. When I was younger, I could never remember the things I really wanted to tell her by the time she came back, and it felt like I didn't know her, and she didn't know me.

”



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UNDERSTANDING SEPARATION FROM PARENTS – ARTICLE 9

Under Article 9 of the UNCRC, children have the right to stay with their parents and not be separated from them unless it's really necessary.

If they do have to be apart, children should still be able to keep in touch and see their parents regularly. This rule says that families are super important for children. Parents help children grow up happy and healthy. If for some reason children have to be away from their parents, it should be for a good reason, and everyone should listen to what the children think about it.

Challenges for Children in Armed Forces Families

Children whose parents are in the armed forces face separations due to their parent's work. Sometimes their parents have to go away for work, like to places far away or even to places where it might not be safe. This can be hard because children might not see their parent for a long time, and it can feel like they're missing out on important family time.

“

Deployment is when a serving person goes away to work, sometimes it's to places like Afghanistan and it can be for up to 7 months. Depending on where they are working and what they're doing, we can get in touch with them but sometimes all we can do is send a 'bluey' which is a letter to a serving person. **It can be hard getting to know them again when they come back from deployment** - Erin

”

“

My dad is in the navy, **because [of this] he was away for Christmas, my birthday and new year** 😞 - Alex

”

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Why It Matters

Being away from a parent for a long time can be really hard for children of all ages. It's not just about missing out on fun times; it can also make children feel worried or sad. Families and grown-ups need to make sure children feel supported and understand what's happening when a parent has to be away.

By listening to children and making sure they have the right information, we can help them feel more secure and cared for, even when their parents have to be far away for work.




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UNDERSTANDING DEPLOYMENT – MOD GUIDELINES

The MOD Harmony Guidelines say how long Service Personnel can be away from their base over three years. These rules are different for each branch of the military:



Royal Navy and
Royal Marines: Up to
660 days away
(about 60% of the
time).



Army: Up to 498 days
away (about 45% of
the time).



Royal Air Force: Up
to 468 days away
(about 43% of the
time).

If a parent works for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines, there's more chance of them being away for more than three months each year, compared to the other services. Those who work for the Navy can be deployed for as long as 9 months. Some children, like those with parents on submarines, might have very little or no contact with their deployed parent for months at a time.

Why These Guidelines Matter

The Harmony Guidelines were made with advice from experts to think about how deployments affect the serving person and their families. It says that while the needs of the military are important, the needs of families are also really important. But it doesn't mention children, separately from their family.

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Staying Connected

During deployments, children often keep in touch with their parent using email or mobile phones. It's really important for children to have access to these technologies so they can stay close to their serving parent, even when they can't see them in person. However, experts say it's also important for children to spend time with their parents face-to-face when they can, not just through screens.

How Children Feel

Many children say that being apart from their parent is the hardest part of having a serving parent. It can make younger children feel sad and miss having their parent around. Older children might worry about their parent's safety and feel anxious. But staying in touch online can help children feel better during these times.

How Children Feel

“

My dad only goes underwater so I don't see him for months at a time for example he's been gone since August and isn't supposed to be back until March, which is 7 months - Sidney.

”

“

Deployment should not at all be over six months especially if toddlers are being raised in the military; when my dad came back from deployment I couldn't remember him - Kai

”



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What Needs to Happen

Because children feel the effects of their parent being away, especially when it gets longer or they can't talk to them, the Harmony Guidelines should clearly say how to think about children's needs too.

Understanding how deployments affect children helps everyone make sure they have the support they need during these times.

UNDERSTANDING DEPLOYMENT – MOD GUIDELINES

Armed forces families sometimes face difficult choices because of decisions made by the MOD about where service personnel need to work.

How often families move to a new place for work, can be different depending on which part of the armed forces the parent serves in.

Sometimes, service personnel have to go to another base for a long time because of training they need to do for their job. These moves can be really important for the parent's career, but for many children, it means they have to live apart from their parent.



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What Happens During Postings

In the quote below, Grace explains postings and how this affects children and young people like herself.

“

“I want to talk about postings and children and young people having to live apart from a parent due to them serving in the armed forces.

A serving person is given a posting detailing where they are going to work. This can be in any part of the UK or where there are bases abroad. The posting depends on where the serving person is needed for work. Some postings are for 18 months or 2 years.

Sometimes people are posted to the same area more than once. Serving personnel can request certain ‘posts’ but they are not guaranteed them and get sent where they are needed.

Depending on the family’s circumstances they may decide not to move to the place where the serving person is going to be working. This might be because of their children’s education (they might be about to sit exams) or their partner can’t find work there.

Every family is different! When a family doesn’t move then the serving person goes ‘married unaccompanied’ this means that they leave their family behind and visit at weekends. They might visit every week, once a month or less depending on where they are posted to.

This means that the children only have one parent most of the time. For example, for me, my dad was a 10–11-hour drive away from us. When he came home on a Friday for a weekend, he was exhausted and slept most of the next day. On the Sunday he was getting ready to go back to work.

Not everyone understands that this is something a serving person has to do because of their job. ”

Weekending & family impact

In the quote below, Christina talks about weekending and how this affects her and her family.

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“

I want to talk about my experience of my dad working away from home because he is posted to England. It varies loads when he can come home to visit us.

Sometimes he can come back for 3 days and then he's away for 3 days, or weeks or 2 months.

Everyone thinks that when a parent comes home it would be a very happy time, and it is but some young people get annoyed as their parent does things differently than you've been used to, or you get into trouble for not doing something you thought they would do now they're home.

They might also get annoyed for being too tired to do an activity with them. Some young people find it hard to adjust when their parent is back and wonder why they would bother when they're just going away again.

”

Impact on Young Children

We don't know a lot about how young children feel when their parent is away because of their job, and this is often forgotten in school and military plans.

The CRC says that early childhood is really important for children to grow up feeling safe and loved by their parents. Children need to feel secure with their family, and when they don't see their parent often, it can be tough:

- They might miss having their parent help them or just be there for them.
- Young children especially need their parent to feel safe and grow up healthy.
- Where they live, who takes care of them, and going to school all can change how they grow up.
- Young children can get really upset when their parent isn't around and might not understand why they have to go.

Children whose parents work in the armed forces sometimes have to get used to their parent being away a lot. They know their parent has to do their job, but they wish they could see them more often. For these children, it's just a normal part of being in a family with someone who serves.

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More Understanding and Support Needed

We need to learn more about how being away from their parents affects very young children and children whose parents are reservists. We need to find ways to help all children who miss their parent because of their job.

UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S BEST INTERESTS

Article 3: Putting Children First

Article 3 of the UNCRC says that children have the right to have what's best for them thought about and made the most important when decisions are being made. This is really important for children whose parents are in the armed forces. Even though decisions are about the military's needs, they also have to think about how it affects children.

What Does Best Interests Mean?

"Best interests" means that when decisions are being made, the grown-ups should think about what will help children the most. The UN says it's a big deal because it's not something people can choose to do—it's something they have to do. It's like saying everyone's rights should be fair.



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Why It Matters for Children in Armed Forces Families

Children in armed forces families sometimes feel like their needs aren't thought about enough, especially when their parents are sent away for a long time:



They feel like they don't get a say when their parent goes away.



Children think there should be rules about how long parents can be away and more breaks to visit home.



They want to know why decisions are made that keep them away from their parent.

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What Children Need



Children want the adults to think more about what's best for them when parents have to be away for work or other decisions made about their jobs. They think the rules about how long parents can be away should be clearer and that there should be more chances for their parent to come home.

What Children Say

“

The minimum they go away for is six months, there needs to be a maximum time and breaks. I want some more communication and to know the why! - Jules

”

“

We don't get a choice when our parents are deployed -
Robyn

”

“

Deployment can be a harsh process, but it is necessary. Our right should always be there and protected - Nick

”



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BEING TREATED FAIRLY

Article 2: No Discrimination

The UNCRC says that every child should be treated fairly, no matter what their parents do. But sometimes, children whose parents are in the armed forces feel like they are treated differently. They might get teased or bullied because of it, which can make them feel sad or worried.

What Children Say

“

People easily make war jokes about when dad goes to deployment because they don't understand - Evelyn

”

“

People don't always understand what it's like to be in a forces child - Sumer

”

How Children Feel

Children have told us that they feel different when they move to a new school or place because of their parent's job.

Making Things Better

It's important to help everyone understand that children from forces families bring strengths and face challenges just like everyone else. Schools that know more about military life have fewer problems with bullying and discrimination.

Article 16: Keeping Things Private

Children in forces families also face challenges with privacy, especially when they live on base or in military homes.



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What Children Say

“

On base, everyone knows

everything, especially the wives.

Friends saying stuff about others -
Francis

”

“

You can't say things that stop them
doing work, they have to wait till they
get home to find out even really
exciting things. **People on dad's**

boat had to come off to get good
news - Rene

”

“

All I say is I love you, but I think it's
quite invasive. You know that they
have got to be read and you might
not want others reading it - Louis

”

What children want

Children want rules that protect their
privacy and help them feel safe,
especially when their parent is away:

- They want their messages to be private and not read by others.
- They want fair rules that make sure their parent can come home to visit or be away for less time.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

To help children in forces families:

- The government should study how separations affect children and find ways to make it easier for them.
- New rules should protect children from being treated differently and help them feel safe and supported.
- Schools should learn more about military life to stop bullying and make sure all children feel welcome.

It's important for everyone to understand that children in forces families deserve to be treated fairly. They should feel safe and supported, especially when their parent is away.

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The government needs to think about how the decisions it makes affects children from forces families. Rules should protect their privacy and make sure their needs are heard and respected.

RIGHTS TO SERVICES: GETTING THE HELP NEEDED

What are rights to services?

The UNCRC says that all children have the right to get the help they need to grow up healthy and happy. This includes things like:



Getting the help families need.

UNCRC
Article 18



Going to the doctor when they are sick.

UNCRC
Article 24



Having a safe place to live.

UNCRC
Article 27



Going to school to learn and grow

UNCRC
Articles 28 & 29

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Challenges for Forces Families

Children whose parents serve in the armed forces sometimes face challenges in getting these rights: Families often have to move because of their parent's service. Even small moves can be hard for children because they change schools and leave friends behind.

Moving a lot can affect how easily children can get the help they need:

- Healthcare: Finding a new doctor every time the family moves.
- Education: Starting at a new school and catching up with new lessons.
- Housing: Finding a new home that feels safe and comfortable.
- Childcare and Family Support: Finding new places and people to help out.

What needs to happen

Every child in a forces family deserves to have the help they need, no matter where they live. Moving should not stop children from getting good healthcare, education, housing, and support from their family and community. Schools, doctors, and families should work together to make sure all children can thrive, no matter how often they move.



Make It Easier:

Schools and doctors should help children settle in quickly after a move.



Stay Close:

Families should get support to find jobs, homes and childcare that are close to where they work.



Listen Up:

Adults should listen to what children need when they move, like making new friends and feeling safe.

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Animations

Through creativity and storytelling, young people from armed forces communities have shared their personal experiences. Each animation offers a glimpse into their world, highlighting what it means to be a forces child today.

Army 01



Navy



Army 02



RAF



Veteran



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HELPING FAMILIES

What the UNCRC Says

Article 18 says that parents have the main job of raising their children well. Governments should help parents do this by providing support when families need it.

What Families in the Armed Forces Face

Families where a parent serves in the armed forces sometimes need extra help. Moving around a lot and having a parent away can be tough for children and their families. They might need support with:

Challenges in Getting Help

Forces families face challenges in getting the support they need:

- **Where to go:** Sometimes families don't know where to find help when they need it.
- **Living off base:** Families living away from military areas can find it harder to access services and support.
- **Temporary help:** Some services are only available for a short time, which might not always be enough.



Feeling safe and happy: Moving to new places and making new friends.



Learning & going to school: Adjusting to new schools & catching up.



Healthcare: Finding new doctors and staying healthy.



Family life: Coping when a parent is away or coming back home.

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What Children Say

“

If contact [with the serving parent] can't be improved, **families need more support to deal with this** -

Riley

”

“

My dad was welfare officer for a long time **which was a bit awks...** -

Cadence

”

Every family in the armed forces should get the help they need to be happy and healthy, no matter where they live or how often they move. Children should feel safe and supported, and families should know where to find help when they need it. It's important that services listen to families and provide the right support for everyone.

What Needs To Happen



More support:

Make sure there are enough people to help families when they move or when parents are away.



Ask families what kind of help they need

and make sure services are helpful for everyone.



Services should be easy for families to get to,

especially if they live away from military areas.



Families should get help for as long as they need it,

not just for a short time.

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WHEN PARENTS LEAVE THE ARMED FORCES FOR FAILING A DRUG TEST

Sometimes, parents in the armed forces have to leave because they failed a drug test. This happens to hundreds of people each year.

When this happens, they usually have to leave the armed forces quite quickly. This can be confusing and scary for the parent and their family. They might not know what will happen next or how it will affect them.

Why It Happens

Some people who join the armed forces might have used drugs before. They might have thought it was okay because their friends did it too. But in the military, it's not allowed, and if they get caught, they have to leave.

Feeling Left Out

After leaving, they might feel left out and not know where to get help. People in the armed forces might not want to be friends with them anymore because of what happened.

Trouble with Family

This can also cause problems with their family. Their relationship with their partner might change, and they might not see their children as much. This can be really hard for children who have the right to see their parents and feel safe.

Losing Benefits

Leaving the armed forces can also mean losing their house and money for education that their children might have been getting. This can make it hard for children to keep going to school and live in a good place.

What Children Need

When this happens, children need extra help to make sure they're safe and okay. They have the right to be protected and not to be hurt in any way. More help should be there for families when this happens to make sure children are okay and things get better for them.

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WHEN PARENTS SEPARATE IN THE ARMED FORCES

Sometimes, parents in the armed forces decide they can't live together anymore. When this happens, it's called separation, and it can be tough for their children.

What Happens Next

If the family was living in a military house (SFA), they might have to move out within three months. This can be hard because the parent who stays with the children might have to ask for help from the government to find a new home.

Why It's Different

Children in military families might not see their serving parent as much after separation. They might have to live with the parent who doesn't serve, and that can mean moving to a new place, sometimes a long way from the military base. This makes it harder for children to see their serving parent regularly, like they used to.

Feeling Upset

When this happens, children might feel really sad and confused.

They might feel like they're losing their connection to the military life they knew, and it can be hard to adjust to all the changes.

Keeping in Touch

It can also be tricky for children to stay in touch with their serving parent. Sometimes they can visit and stay overnight, but it's not always possible. This can make them feel like they're losing a part of who they are as a forces child.

What Children Need

When parents in the armed forces separate, children need extra help to understand what's happening and to stay connected with both parents. They have the right to see their parents and feel safe and loved, even if their family is going through big changes. More support should be there for families to help children cope with all the changes that come with separation.

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CHILDCARE: HELPING FAMILIES WHEN PARENTS WORK

Article 16 also says that children whose parents work should have good places to go for care. This includes before and after school, during holidays, and when parents are away for work.

Childcare for Families in the Armed Forces

Families where a parent serves in the armed forces often face challenges finding childcare:



Not enough places:

Sometimes there aren't enough places for children, especially those with additional needs. Families might have to wait a long time to find a spot when they move to a new place.



When parents are

away: During deployments, the parent at home might need help with childcare during evenings, weekends, and holidays. It's hard when caregivers are not familiar to the child.

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What needs to happen

More help for families:



More places: where children can go before & after school, during holidays & weekends, & when parents are away.



Easier access: It should be easier for families to find out about & use these services, even if they move a lot.



Families should have access to childcare for as long as they need it, not just for a short time.

Every family in the armed forces should have access to good childcare so parents can work when needed. It's important to listen to families to make sure these services are what they need and that there are enough places for children, no matter where they live or how often they move.

EDUCATION: LEARNING EVEN WHEN YOU MOVE

The UNCRC says all children should have the chance to learn and grow. It's important for children from families in the armed forces, too. Article 28 says children have the right to learn, and Article 29 says what you learn should help you become your best self. It should include things you are interested in and like to do, such as music or drama.

Moving Schools Because of Forces Life

Sometimes children in forces families have to change schools often. About 17% of armed forces families with school-age children move because of a parent's job every year. This can make it hard to keep up with schoolwork and make new friends. Moving can mean missing parts of lessons and sometimes not being able to study certain subjects because of different school rules or spaces.

“

It can be hard if both people move, and you decide to stay for education. **You should have a right to live in your childhood in one place** - Timmy

”

How It Affects Children



Making friends: It's tough to make new friends when you move a lot. Some children even feel left out because of this.



Some children find it hard to go to school regularly, especially when their parents are away.

“

I missed two years of primary school due to moving back and forwards between the UK and Germany, also repeating topic between England and Scotland. I wasn't supported with hobbies and interests, so I was bored - Cadence

”

Staying in One Place for School

Some families try hard to keep children in the same school:



Choices families make: Some families send their children to boarding school with help from the MOD. This can help with education but might be tough for children emotionally.



Staying together: Other families stay together and figure out ways for children to keep learning while parents move for work.

Going to University and College

Getting into college or university can be harder for children from forces families.



Getting funding: It can be tricky to get money for college or university because rules are different in different parts of the UK. In Scotland, there's special help for children who grew up there and want to go to college but it can still be hard to get if you have moved around a lot.

It's important for children in forces families to have a good education no matter where they live or how often they move. Schools and governments should help children learn and be able to do things they are interested in and reach goals beyond education

Schools and governments should help children learn and feel supported, so they can reach their goals in education and beyond. Every child deserves a chance to learn and grow, no matter what challenges they face because of their parent's job in the armed forces.

GETTING EXTRA HELP IN SCHOOL

Children in forces families sometimes need extra help in school. This could be because they move a lot, or they have additional needs like dyslexia or autism. In England, they call this Special Educational Needs (SEN). In Scotland it is called Additional Support for Learning, and help is there for any short or long-term need that makes it harder for a child to learn everything in school. You don't need a diagnosis to get help in Scotland. Being a forces child is one reason some may want extra help.

Challenges Children Face



- **Recognition of Needs:** Some children say their schools don't always understand their needs. When schools do recognise and help them, it makes a big difference.



- **Delays in Support:** Moving schools a lot can cause delays in getting help, like assessments for dyslexia or ADHD.



- **Finding Information:** Parents find it hard to get the right information about what support their children can get, especially when they move.

What Children Say

“

Teachers providing more support in school as I have no place to study at home - Toby

”

“

Our teacher let the whole class get outside to watch my dad's boat leave. It helped a lot - Arnie

”

What Children and Parents Think Will Help

Children have ideas on how schools can do better:



- **Whole School Approach:** Children want schools to use special tools and ways of supporting that help everyone learn better.

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- **Better Data and Support:** It's important for governments to collect info about how well children in forces families do in school and afterwards. This can help them get better support.



- **Information Sharing:** Schools need to share information about children when they move, like what help they need and any safety concerns. Children should have a say in what gets shared and why.



- **Quick Support:** Schools should quickly put in place any support a child needs when they start at a new school. This helps them settle in and learn well.

Every child should get the help they need to learn, no matter what support they need. Schools and governments should work together to make sure children in forces families get the support that helps them enjoy learning.

TAKING CARE OF YOUR HEALTH

Everyone deserves good health. Article 24 says all children have the right to the best health they can have and get the medical help they need. This means they should have access to doctors, dentists, and treatments to keep them well. But sometimes, children from forces families face challenges in getting the healthcare they need because they move around a lot.

Challenges in Getting Healthcare

- **Long Waiting Times:** Moving often can mean waiting longer to see a doctor or get treatment. Some families even have to pay to see a doctor privately because they can't wait.
- **Access to Services:** Not all children find it easy to get to a GP or dental services when they need them. This makes it harder for them to stay healthy.





- **Mental Health Support:** Being in a forces family can sometimes make children feel worried or sad, especially when a parent is away. Getting help for these feelings can be tough too.

How Children and Parents feel

- **Struggles with Appointments:** Some children find it hard to get appointments with doctors or dentists.
- **Stress of Waiting:** Waiting for assessments or treatments, like for autism or ADHD, can be really stressful for children and their families.
- **Support for Feelings:** Some children feel better when they get support for their worries or sadness. Services like "Your Mind Matters" help them feel happier.

What Children Say

“

NHS waiting lists are long and people are having to go private, but some can't afford it. People are pushed to paying for private - Lena

”

“

Moving around disrupting being on wait lists so chose to stay registered in England to get treatment even though living in Scotland - Emily

”

“

Stress of waitlists especially for autism and ADHD - Aiden

”

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Making Healthcare Easier

- **Sharing Information:** It's important for doctors to know about a child's health history when they move. This helps them get the right care quickly.
- **Improving Mental Health Services:** Children need better access to mental health services, especially if they move a lot. This can help them feel better when they're sad or worried.

Children have the right to the best possible health. Information must be shared between different health services to make sure all children from armed forces families receive the best care possible, for their mental and physical health. Governments and doctors should work together to make sure children in forces families are able to stay healthy and happy, no matter where they live.

FINDING A GOOD PLACE TO LIVE

Article 27 says every child has the right to have a home that's safe and comfortable. This means having a place where they feel happy and can grow up well. But for children in armed forces families, finding a good home can sometimes be tricky because their parents can move around a lot or the accommodation provided by the armed forces isn't a good standard.



Service Family Accommodation (SFA): Some families live in homes provided by the military. These homes are similar to each other, which can make moving easier for children because they are familiar.



Other Homes: Some families choose to live in private houses or apartments that they rent or own. These homes might be near a military base or somewhere else.

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What Children Say

“
I like that the houses are the same as my friends. I've been in nine military houses, but they were all similar so feels like one house -
Sophia

“
Most equipment in the house was breaking. The sink was replaced three times, and the shower was breaking. Electricity kept going out. Mould throughout the house. Rooms smell rank - Elizabeth

“
The Boiler stopped working during “beast from the east” and no one would fix it - Holly

Making Homes Better



- **Getting Repairs:** Sometimes, it's hard for families to get repairs done quickly in military homes. This can be frustrating for children and their parents.
- **Feeling Embarrassed:** Some children feel embarrassed to invite friends over because their home has problems. This can make it hard for them to have fun with their friends.

Making Homes Better



- **Better Homes:** The government needs to make sure that all military homes are safe and nice for families to live in, especially in Scotland where there are fewer of these homes and they have not had money spent to make them better.
- **Listening to Children:** It's important for adults to listen to what children say about their homes and make sure they feel comfortable and happy there.

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Every child should have a good place to call home. Military housing must be kept to the best standard to make sure children and their families are safe and comfortable. Governments and people who run military homes should work together to make sure that these homes are always in the best possible state for families moving in.

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SUPPORTING YOUNG CARERS IN ARMED FORCES FAMILIES

Some children in armed forces families have special responsibilities because they help take care of their family members. These children are called young carers. They might do things like cook meals, look after their siblings, or help their parents when they're sick or away.

Different Challenges

Young carers in forces families face unique challenges. For example, when a parent is away on duty, they might need to do more at home. If a parent gets hurt or is away for a long time, the young person might have to step up even more.



Marie's Story



A lot of young carers in forces families don't even know that they are one and they don't have the support out there. Since I was born, my dad has been in the Navy. Although I love what my dad does, this has an effect on my caring roles and my family as a whole. Sometimes it is difficult as I don't have the support from my dad as he isn't able to be there physically to help my mum, brothers and me. If my mum is working or isn't feeling well it's on me to make dinner, look after my brothers and help my mum. I miss my dad and his job has made it hard to come to events or holidays and sometimes we don't even get to have any contact with him for a large amount of time. I think it was hard when he was away and my mum was sick, especially around the time we moved.

More on me looking after my younger brother and I'm a young carer. They tell dad he can come home then say he isn't allowed. We need a date and understanding of the date change.



Mixed Support

Some families say they get more help from groups outside the military than from the military itself. Military support might only be available during deployments, which makes it hard to plan for the future.

Moving Challenges

When families move to a new place, it can be hard to find support quickly. Each area might have different rules about who can get help and when. This can leave young carers and families feeling lost without the support they need.

Getting Help

Sometimes it takes a long time to get the right help, like a Young Carers Statement, which shows what support a young carer needs. Different rules in different parts of the UK can also make it harder.

Family Choices

Some families choose to stay in one place so the family, including the young carer can keep getting support. But this means the serving parent might have to travel a lot to see their family.

Conclusion

It's important for everyone to understand the challenges young carers in forces families face. They need support that's there when they need it, no matter where they live.



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SPECIAL SUPPORT FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

Disabled children have extra protections under the UNCRC, and they should get special help to live happy, healthy lives.

Challenges for Disabled Children in Forces Families

Disabled children in forces families face extra problems with housing, school, and getting medical help.

“

SFA housing is not accessible for disabilities. Our house was difficult to maneuver, and dad had to build decking to accommodate my sister's wheelchair as MoD would take too long. It was a flat on the first floor and we had to carry my sister up and down the stairs. The MoD will try to accommodate but it's not good enough. My dad left the army five years ago because the houses weren't suitable for my sister - Jaiden

”

Jaiden told us about how their SFA house wasn't good for his sister, who uses a wheelchair. It was hard for her to move around, and Jaiden had to do a lot more to help her.

“

Our house was hard to get around. **Dad had to build a ramp because the MoD took too long.** It was a flat on the first floor, so we had to carry my sister up and down the stairs. The MoD tried to help, but it wasn't enough - Jaiden

”

Getting the Right Support

Some children miss out on services like Speech and Language Therapy because of long waiting lists. It's also tough when they have to move and keep getting their needs reassessed and telling their story over and over again. Older children find it hard to manage their health needs for themselves because of all the moving and different systems.

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Changes Can Be Tough

For autistic children, moving to a new place and dealing with changes in family routines can be very hard. One family decided the serving parent wouldn't come home on weekends during a long training course because it was too much for their autistic child.

School Challenges

Children with extra support needs also find it hard to keep getting the help they need when they change schools. This is especially tricky when moving between different countries, as each place supports disabilities differently.

Lack of Childcare

We've heard that there aren't enough good childcare options for disabled children, especially those in secondary school. This makes it harder for them to make friends and for their non-serving parent to keep a job, affecting the whole family's life.

What We Need

We need better housing, school support, healthcare, and childcare for disabled children in forces families. They are entitled to all the help and resources to make sure their rights are protected.



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SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHEN A PARENT DIES IN THE FORCES

Losing a parent is really tough, especially for children. When a parent in the armed forces dies, it's even harder because it means losing more than just mum or dad.

Additional losses

For children in forces families, losing a serving parent can mean losing their home, the money that helps them stay in school, and their friends in the armed forces community.

These children face more challenges to get what they need to stay safe, protected, and included compared to other children who lose a parent. If they lived in Service Family Housing, they might have to leave in as little as 93 days. This means leaving their old home, school, and friends all at once.

Lack of Support

Families might get help at first, but it often stops quickly. This can make families feel alone and like they don't belong anymore.

Money Problems

The family's money situation changes too. They might get less money than they would if the serving parent had finished their service. This can affect how long the children can stay in school.

Losing Their Military Identity

Children in this situation feel like they lose their identity as a forces child. They aren't part of a serving family anymore, and they haven't become a veteran family yet. It feels like their connection to the military ends with their parent.

Help from Scotty's Little Soldiers

Scotty's Little Soldiers helps children who have lost a serving parent. They give support that understands the loss of a parent and the military community. However, they don't give specialized help for grieving. They help families find other services for that.

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Waiting for Help

Children might wait a long time to get the right help. Some rules mean they might not get help right away. When they do get help, it might not understand all the hard things they've been through because their parent was serving.

What These Children Need

Children who lose a serving parent need more help to understand what they're going through. They deserve support to feel safe, cared for, and part of a community again.



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PROTECTING OUR PLANET

Our world is facing a big challenge called climate change, which affects everything from the air we breathe to the animals in our forests. Children and young people are speaking up about this because they care about our planet's future.

Why It Matters

Climate change can cause problems like storms and floods that make life harder for people everywhere. It might even mean more armed forces personnel are sent to help in places affected by these problems. This could mean some children have less time with their parents because they're helping others.

What Children Are Saying

Children have great ideas, like planting more trees or finding new ways to reuse things, to help protect our environment. They want decision-makers to listen to their ideas because they want to make sure our world stays healthy.

Thinking About Tomorrow

Children are worried about what's going to happen next with climate change. They want to make sure our planet is safe and healthy for them and for everyone who comes after them.

Making a Difference

It's important for everyone to work together to protect our environment. Children have good ideas that can help, and they want to be heard when decisions are made about our planet's future.



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WHAT MUST BE DONE TO ENSURE RIGHTS TO SERVICES

To help children in forces families:

- **Support should be available to all forces families who want it.** Children should be involved in saying what these services do and how they work.
- **Schools should work with forces children to make schools the best place** they can be for them and their friends.

- **The right information about school, health and anything else that is important for the child,** should follow them wherever they go. They should know what is said about them and why. They must be able to ask for this to be changed and to understand when it can't be.

- **Things must be better for forces children.** Their houses should be the best possible, they should be able to get help with their learning and physical and mental health and their parents should be able to access the childcare they need.

- **Children who are no longer part of a forces family** should get the help they need. It must not matter why they are no longer part of it.

RIGHT TO BE INVOLVED AND MAKE THINGS BETTER

Every child has the right to be involved in all areas of their life. This includes:

- **Having a say about things that affect them** and be taken seriously.
- **Being able to rest and play.**
- **Being able to keep in touch and make new friends..**
- **Having access to information and staying safe online.**
- **Getting help when things aren't right.**

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“

My stepdad has served with the RAF since he was 18. He and my mum got together when I was 2 and we were living near a base in England. He has had a posting in Italy and a couple across the UK. I have moved 4 times now.

When I was 14, we moved as a family to the north of Scotland. My stepdad got lots of information about the new base and his new role, but my mum didn't get anything and had to rely on my stepdad telling her. There was no information for me. I would have really liked information about schools, clubs, and things to do in the local area. That would have made the move and leaving my old friends and school a little bit easier. It feels like there is never any information for children. I don't get to see what information my stepdad gets.

I was excited to be moving because it meant I was going to meet new people and have new places to explore. It was also sad because I was leaving friends and my cricket club. I can't play cricket to the same standard up here and I was on track for playing professionally while in England.

My little brother can't join the local cubs as there is a really long waiting list. I must admit that I can find it hard to make new friends as I am already thinking about having to move on again and wondering if there is any point. Then I remind myself that I have friends in lots of places, and I can keep in touch with them on social media, though sometimes we have just drifted apart anyway. Social media can be so helpful sometimes, but I avoid it while my stepdad is away because I see things about war and conflict, and it just makes me so worried about him. I avoid the news for the same reason.

I really enjoy working with Forces Children Scotland because they help me make connections with other young people like me. They also listen to what I have to say and try to make a difference for me in my school, local area and with the government. It is really important that children from military families are listened to, and our opinions taken seriously.

”

[Listen to audio here.](#)

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“

Our lives are different from the average young person and people need to understand the impact being in a forces family has on us. I feel like lots of decisions that are made about my stepdad's work have a negative impact on me but I don't know what I can do about that. My stepdad and mum have talked to me before about where we could go next on a posting but ultimately my stepdad and the RAF will make the decision about what is best for the RAF and my stepdad's career. I don't think they take me into consideration at all when they make their decisions. I keep hearing about child friendly complaints, but I don't know whether or not I even have the right to complain. If I do, I don't know who to complain to or if they would take me seriously.

I hear all the time about my right to be heard but my stepdad's work never asks me what I think and what would help me. I wish someone would ask me what help would work best for me. I also wish they would give me all the information I need to understand why they make the decisions they make.

”

YOUR RIGHT TO BE HEARD

Speaking up and being listened to is important. Children have the right to talk about things that affect them.

This is called Article 12 of the UNCRC. It means that your opinions should be taken seriously, regardless of how old you are and how much you understand. It is up to adult to make this easy for you.

Children from forces families can find it hard to be heard. They feel like governments make decisions about them all the time but don't think about them or listen to them.



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What Children Say

“

I think for some kids **it would be beneficial if there were people to talk and listen to them about how they're feeling** - Aaliyah

”

“

I was left in the dark when my dad was under deployment I was never told where he went, I was also left in the dark when he was medivac'd back to the UK - Ash

”

When I was younger not much information was shared about where my dad got deployed moving etc. it was all told days before, probably because of how young we were, they thought I didn't care - Amesh

”

Finding Solutions

- **Making Rights Known:** Adults should learn about children's rights so they know how to treat children fairly. All decisions and policies that affect children should be looked at to work out how they affect them and what should be different.
- **Getting Information:** It's important to get the right information at the right time. This helps you understand what's happening around you.



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RIGHT TO PLAY AND MAKE FRIENDS

Every child has the right to play, rest, and spend time with friends. This is what Article 31 of the UNCRC says.

Understanding Your Rights

- **Playing and Resting:** Children need time to play and rest to stay healthy and happy.
- **Making Friends:** It's important to have friends and spend time with them. This helps children learn new things and feel good about themselves.

What Children Say

“
No access once you move to hobbies you have done elsewhere like ice hockey - Timmy”

“

I've not had a youth club since Germany. Youth Clubs depend on how many go, youth workers keep leaving and it stops. People aren't sure of it, could be good - Cadence

”

“

I moved when I was 11, it was hard to have after school clubs due to living far away, even harder when dad was away. When it's just one parent its tricky, especially when mum was sick, and the deployed parent can't take you - Sophia

”

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Challenges for Forces Families

- **Moving Around:** Sometimes, families in the forces move to new places a lot. This can make it hard to join clubs or play with friends.
- **Finding Activities:** Children might not know what fun things they can do in a new area. It can also be tricky to join clubs because of waiting lists or costs.

Finding Solutions

- **Staying Connected:** Children can use social media to keep in touch with friends from other places but this isn't always best for them.
- **Supporting Activities:** Adults can help by finding ways for children to keep doing their hobbies, like sports or arts, even when they move.
- **Making Things Fair:** It's important that every child, no matter where they live, has the chance to join clubs and have fun without it costing too much.

Even though moving a lot can make it tough to play and make friends, children still have the right to enjoy their free time and meet new people. Adults should help make sure children can keep doing the things they love, even if they have to move around a lot. This helps everyone feel happy and included in their community.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION AND STAY SAFE ONLINE

Article 17 of the UNCRC says that children should have access to lots of different kinds of news and information. This helps children understand what's happening in their community and beyond.

Keeping Safe Online

- **Good Information:** It's important for children to get news and information that's true and helpful.

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- **Protecting You:** Adults should make sure children don't see things online that could worry them or be bad for them.

Challenges for Forces Families

- **Knowing About Conflicts:** Sometimes, children in forces families see news about places where their parents might go. This can make them feel scared or worried.
- **Finding the Truth:** It can be hard to tell what's true online, like stories that aren't real. This makes it tough to understand what's really happening.
- **Feeling Worried:** Some children worry when they see news about places where their parents are. This can make it hard to sleep or focus in school.
- **Keeping Safe:** Children in Northern Ireland might need to keep their lives private online to protect their families. This can feel hard when you can't share everything with friends.

Challenges for Forces Families

- **Staying Connected:** Social media lets children stay in touch with friends even if they move a lot. This helps them feel connected and supported.

How Adults Can Help

- **Explaining News:** Adults can help explain news and stories so children understand what's happening.
- **Staying Safe:** They can also make sure children only see good things online that won't scare them or make them feel bad.

Even though news and social media can be tricky, children still have the right to learn and stay safe online. Adults should help children understand what's real and what's not, and make sure they feel safe and supported online. This way, children can use the internet to learn and have fun without worrying too much.

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CHILDREN & ADULTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT RIGHTS & HOW TO USE THEM

Children have the right to be taught about rights and how to use them so they can speak up if something isn't fair or right. Article 42 of the UNCRC says that everyone should know about children's rights. This helps children understand when their rights might not be respected and do something to make it better.

Making Sure things are right

- **Speaking Up:** It's important for children to be supported to tell someone if they think their rights have been broken.
- **Getting Help:** Adults should be there to help children understand their rights and support them when they need or want to make a complaint.

Challenges for Forces Families

- **Feeling Ignored:** Sometimes, children from forces families feel like adults don't listen when they talk about things that are hard for them.
- **Confusing Rules:** It can be tricky to know who to talk to or how to complain about things like long deployments or moving a lot as these decisions are made about parents not children.

What Children Say

“

Better to complain to Welfare but they don't take it seriously. **Children are not taken seriously** - Lucas

”

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“

Accessible for all ages, **there should be different ways to complain, and adults should make it possible** -

Charlie

”

“

Listen to you and make sure you are safe - Lena

”

What needs to be different

- **Speaking Out:** Children should have access to help when and how they need it. It should be easy for them to tell people when things aren't right.
- **Making Things Better:** Children should be involved in making things better or different. Their complaints can help change rules or laws so that other children don't have the same problems.
- **Listening Carefully:** Adults should listen to what children have to say and work with them to find solutions.

- **Making Changes:** Leaders and politicians should change rules when they see that children's rights aren't being respected. They should actively look for things that aren't working for children.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

To help children in forces families:

- The government **must teach children and adults about children's rights** and makes sure forces children are supported when their rights are broken. It should be easy for them to complain.
- The government must help forces children to keep their hobbies, clubs and friends, **no matter how often they move or when they move to.**
- **Schools should learn more about military life** to stop bullying and make sure all children feel welcome.
- Children **should be part** of making the services that help them.

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CHILDREN'S RIGHTS FOR THOSE LEAVING THE FORCES AND BECOMING PART OF A VETERAN FAMILY

“

My mum served in the Royal Marines for 20 years. When I was 15, she hurt her knee while on a training exercise and could no longer serve. It felt like her leaving the marines happened so fast, she might have got information about how to become a civilian, but I didn't. She told me later that because it happened so quickly, she didn't have the support she needed to make the transition. If she hadn't been hurt, she would have started the process a few years before she left. I thought that I knew everything about moving house and school and losing friends and connections because I had done it so many times before. This was different! I lost all of these things all over again, but I also lost my connection to the forces community. I didn't know who I was anymore as so much of who I am was about being a forces child.

We moved off base and back to be closer to my grandparents. We had to present as homeless to the Local Authority. It felt really embarrassing after all that we had sacrificed while my mum was serving. My mum and dad are really smart but initially they found it hard to manage their money, as so many things like rent and electricity had been included in my mum's job.

It felt really embarrassing after all that we had sacrificed while my mum was serving. My mum and dad are really smart but initially they found it hard to manage their money, as so many things like rent and electricity had been included in my mum's job. Money was also tight because mum's injury meant that it was hard for her to get a new job on 'civvy street'. She also had lots a difficulty understanding what benefits she could get and how they worked with her forces compensation she gets due to her injury. Everything just felt so hard and so different from the forces. I didn't know anyone else in my new school whose parent was in the forces and no-one in my new school understood what it meant to me that my mum had become a veteran.

This move was the hardest because I didn't have access to all the support I had while mum was serving, and I didn't know where to go to ask for support. Because of mum's injury I had to do more to help her around the house and with my younger siblings. It was only after a couple of years that I recognised that I was a young carer. Linking in with the local young carers service has been one of the best things for me.

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I finally got some support, and the service took the time to understand what my life was like not just as a young carer but also as the child of a veteran.



Feeling Lost

Many children say it's hard to find out what happens next when someone leaves the armed forces. Sometimes, families feel like they're losing their old community that they've been part of for a long time. There is no information for children.

Moving and Housing

- **Moving Away:** Leaving Service Family Accommodation (SFA) might mean moving to a new area where there aren't many other families from the armed forces. This can make it harder to feel connected and find new friends who understand what the child has been through.
- **Homeless Challenges:** Some families may even face being homeless temporarily because they haven't been on the waiting list for a council house while their parent was serving. This can be tough when they have already moved around so much.

Changes in Identity and Support

- **Feeling Different:** After leaving, children might feel like they don't belong to the armed forces world anymore. This can affect how they feel about themselves and their connection to services that used to help them.
- **Support for Parents:** Sometimes, children might need to help take care of a parent who's been hurt or isn't well after leaving the armed forces. This can be tough and take a long time to get the right help.

Money and Help with Costs

- **Financial Struggles:** Families might find it hard to pay for things like rent or bills for the first time. This can cause a lot of stress and make it hard to enjoy life like they used to.
- **Getting Benefits:** Some adults might find it tricky to get the help they need from the government, even though their parent served in the armed forces. This can feel confusing and unfair.

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Understanding Your Rights

It's important that service family's sacrifices are recognised. These families are covered by the Armed Forces Covenant Duty and veteran families should be able to speak up and get help. By speaking up and supporting each other, families can make sure they get the help they need to start a new chapter in their lives.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

To help children in veteran families:

- **The government should do everything they can to understand what it feels like for a child** when their parent leaves the armed forces.
- **The government must make sure that children and their families are not worse off than their parent served.** Planning needs to start as soon as it can and children must be part of this.
- **Governments must make sure they know which children are from veteran families** and what they need to make things as good as they can be welcome.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

We hope that with the UNCRC becoming part of Scots Law, more people, both children and adults, will know about children's rights. This means that in Scotland, more children will understand their rights and how to use them. It's also important that adults respect and support these rights.

Children whose parents are in the armed forces sometimes face challenges with their rights in areas like education, healthcare, playing with friends, having privacy, and being away from their parents.

These children's voices are often not heard, and they can face difficulties because decisions that affect them are made by different governments, including the Scottish Government and the UK Government through the MOD. It's crucial to pay attention to these children and find ways to help them when they face barriers to having their rights protected.

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The UK, Scottish and local governments, especially the MOD, should conduct reviews (called CRIAs) to see how their rules and policies affect these children. They must find ways to reduce any negative impact on children's rights and do more of the things that are helping. Children from armed forces families should be involved in making these reviews, checking them over, and seeing how well they work.

Children have the right to be listened to and involved in finding solutions and designing services that can help with the challenges they face. Even though some problems are very tricky, we will keep listening to what children say, coming up with solutions together, and telling leaders what we find.

Children from forces families should have support and ways to complain if they think their rights have been broken. They shouldn't have to rely on others to do this for them. All parts of the government and services should create ways for children to easily complain if something isn't fair.

Together, we can make sure every child's voice is heard and their rights are respected.

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HOW WE GATHERED INFORMATION

This report is all about real-life experiences. We combined these experiences with research to understand more about forces children's lives.

What We Did for the Human Rights Bill Consultation

From August to September 2023, we held special sessions in schools and online to talk about the Human Rights Bill Consultation. We spoke with 151 children and young people from all over Scotland, ages 8 to 19.

During these sessions, we did lots of activities put together by Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) to talk about rights. First, we drew and talked about what a fair Scotland should look like for everyone. Then, we did a Circle of Contacts activity. We also asked who they'd talk to if they felt their rights weren't being respected where we asked who's important to them and who makes decisions that affect their lives.

One of our favourite activities was the Solutions Tree. We used it to show where their rights might not be respected (the roots), who should help them (the trunk), what adults should do about it (the branches), and how they should feel when things are made right (the leaves or fruit). These activities gave us so much information and amazing ideas from the young people. They talked about more than just the questions in the Human Rights Bill Consultation. We decided to write this report to share all these extra thoughts and ideas.

What Happened Next

Right after we sent our ideas to the consultation, the UNCRC Bill was looked at again by the Scottish Parliament. On January 15th, it became law. We then expanded our report to focus more on children's rights. This was to show how children from forces families face special challenges, just as the UNCRC Act started..

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We spent time looking at how service life affects children's rights. We listened to parents at community events and checked our own advisory service. Then, we planned more things to do with children and young people. At a special Rights Residential, 8 young people aged 12 to 19 came together. We played Rights Jenga to see which rights are affected by life in the armed forces. We played a giant Snakes and Ladders game to talk about what happened when their rights were followed or not. We used other fun activities to talk about privacy, family help, housing, and what a good way to complain would be.

Conclusion

By listening to children and young people and doing these fun activities, we learned a lot about their lives and what's important to them. This helped us write this report to make sure everyone knows about children's rights for forces children and makes Scotland a fairer place for them.

