

Whole Family Support and Child Poverty

We welcome the commitment to the continued provision of family support but this needs to be extended to families from armed forces and veteran communities. Forces families do not receive direct support from the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and aren't as likely to access local support as they are unlikely to be known to social work who act as the gatekeepers to support in most local authorities. Many forces families don't seek out support outside of the MOD for fears of security concerns or that civilians will not understand the unique challenges of forces life.

These families face significant pressures through deployments, lengthy training exercises and highly mobile lives. When this results in a relationship breakdown it frequently throws the family into poverty. Parents may struggle to secure housing or employment when separated and the serving parent may struggle to see their children on a regular basis due to travel costs and accommodation problems.

As a grant-giving organisation, in the last five months 42% of our grants were given because of family breakdown, another 42% because of disability and 13% because of both family breakdown and disability. Forces families need access to family support that understands their needs to prevent family breakdown, child poverty and homelessness.

Due to the unique challenges faced by these families, these services must be designed with and for them and account for deployments and frequent moves. The Programme for Government does promise to co-design, but we strongly urge the government to not forget about armed forces families when designing family support services.

Housing

The Programme for Government makes a commitment for the Housing Bill to place stronger duties on Local Authorities and partners to work together to prevent homelessness, and emphasis on holistic support with relevant bodies working together. Everyone should have a warm and safe place to call home and forces families are no different.

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Many children from forces families experience homelessness. For some it occurs following a relationship breakdown and for others it comes when the serving person leaves the armed forces and transitions to civilian life.

For all families previously living in Service Family Accommodation, homelessness comes with the additional challenges of paying rent, utilities and other daily bills for the first time. This may feel overwhelming for some families.

There are 15,000 serving personnel leaving the forces every yearⁱ. To prevent homelessness for these families and realise the Scottish Governments aspirations to be the destination of choice for veteransⁱⁱ, work must be done with the MOD to identify early those moving out of SFA and the forces.

For those thrown into homelessness due to relationship breakdown, all local authority housing and education workers must be trained in the Armed Forces Covenant Duty and forces life so that they can best support this group and help them secure permanent accommodation as soon as possible and with the least possible moves. Children in this situation have already experienced multiple moves and separations due to forces life. Research has shown that this can have a detrimental impact on their wellbeing and development^{iiiiv}. Research also shows that living in temporary accommodation has a negative impact on children.^v Special consideration and measures are needed to stop forces children experiencing the compounding impact of these experiences on their development.

These requirements must be considered in the drafting of the Housing Bill amendments and associated statutory guidance. Any action to prevent homelessness or support families out of temporary housing must consider the unique needs of forces families and include family support and education on managing finances and household bills.

The Housing Bill must deliver the necessary changes to deliver children's right to adequate housing under the UNCRC.

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Education

Education is one of the key areas that children and young people from armed forces families highlight as a challenge. There are over 12,500 children and young people from armed forces and veteran families in education in Scotland and their needs are not always met^{vi}.

We are disappointed that Programme for Government does not go far enough in delivering the reform of education that children and young people across the country have asked for in the Muir and Hayward reviews. Reform of the system is needed for all children and young people to thrive and develop their full potential in line with the UNCRC. More needs to be done to ensure the system meets the needs of children and young people from armed forces and veteran families.

This group is named within the Additional Support for Learning: Statutory Guidance 2017 as a group that may need additional support, yet this is not mentioned within the PfG^{vii}. There is an implementation gap in Additional Support for Learning, and this group is greatly affected.

The reform to qualification bodies in Scotland does not go far enough to listen to the voices of children and young people. We urge the Scottish Government to take more transformational reform of these bodies and co-design this with children and young people at the centre. Children and young people in Scotland have a right to an education that develops their interests and talents, and the Scottish Government must ensure these upcoming reforms do so.

Childcare

Childcare is a topic that not only concerns parents, but also children and young people. Over half of all Service families (55%) have at least one child of school age and 50% of these families required childcare such as breakfast or afterschool clubs^{viii}. Families need more support to know what is available to them as they move around the UK where childcare systems and initiatives may differ.

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Moving around may mean going to the bottom of waiting lists for childcare or face increasing costs. There is also not enough flexible childcare available as many families require this before or after school, evenings or weekends which is not always an option. Many bases are in rural or remote locations meaning the availability of formal childcare is even less.

Although we welcome the commitment to ensure affordable, high-quality funded early learning and childcare, it must include childcare beyond the early years and be available in areas where there is a high concentration of military families. Many armed forces families have said they require childcare before and after school, in evenings and weekends which is simply not widely available or affordable. More work is needed in this area by the Scottish Government, particularly for rural communities where many armed forces families reside. Children and young people have told us they often have to care for their younger siblings, especially when their serving parent is deployed or away on training. This can have a negative impact on their ability to see friends, pursue interests and access hobbies.

The Scottish Government must commit to doing more to invest in good quality childcare for school-aged children.

Human Rights Bill

We are disappointed to see the Human Rights Bill has not been included after last year's consultation and we call on the Scottish Government to rethink this and make this a legislative priority.

Overall, Forces Children Scotland believes the Programme for Government could have gone further to making Scotland the best place for children and young people to grow up, including those in armed forces and veteran families. We will continue to work with decision-makers to amplify the voices of children and young people from armed forces and veteran families.

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SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT: PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

Response - September 2024



ⁱ [Living in our shoes full report \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk) page 152.

ⁱⁱ [Armed forces and veterans community - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

ⁱⁱⁱ Children's Commissioner, *Kin and Country: Growing Up as an Armed Forces Child*, June 2018, Page 4-5.

^{iv} Godier-McBard, Wood and Fossey. [The Impact of Service Life on the Military Child: The Overlooked Casualties of Conflict- Update and Review Report](#), May 2021, Page 24, 25, 43.

^v Procter, Pratt and Wise-Martin (2023) [Call for evidence findings: summary, analysis of themes and call to action](#), APPG for Households in Temporary Accommodation, page 22

^{vi} [Rallying to the Flag \(napier.ac.uk\)](https://napier.ac.uk) page 5.

^{vii} [Supporting Children's Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education \(Additional Support for Learning\) Scotland Act 2004 \(as amended\): Code of Practice \(Third Edition\) 2017 \(www.gov.scot\)](#) page 11.

^{viii} [UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2024 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk), page 15.

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