

**FORCES
CHILDREN
SCOTLAND**



**IMPACT REPORT
2023-24**

WELCOME
TO OUR

IMPACT • REPORT

2023-24

Thank you for taking an interest in learning about all that Forces Children Scotland has achieved this year. Before we get started, we want to tell you a little about our organisation, mission, and vision.

We support over **13,000** children and young people from armed forces and veteran families across Scotland to realise their potential and thrive.

Our charity was founded in 1815, just four days before the Battle of Waterloo.

Today, Forces Children Scotland is committed to supporting over 13,000 children and young people from armed forces and veteran families across Scotland. As a strengths-based organisation, we work directly with children, young people, and partners to co-produce our projects, services, and campaigns. Together, we strive to achieve our vision of making Scotland a place where all children & young people from armed forces communities can feel heard, understood, and empowered to overcome unique challenges. We want them to dream big and pursue positive futures.



We deliver face-to-face and digital mental health & wellbeing services, to help understand a range of topics and to adopt effective strategies.

We deliver youth participation activities that build confidence, develop new skills, expand aspirational horizons, and help to make new friends.

We support children and young people in standing up for their rights and amplifying their lived experiences to policymakers to achieve meaningful change.

We deliver accredited face-to-face and online CPD training to professionals and decision makers to enhance understanding and practice to better meet the unique support needs of this community.

We provide a little extra financial help through grant-giving for young carers, students, and families from armed forces communities to cover many of life's essentials.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to become the sector-leading charity in Scotland that supports children and young people, from armed forces communities. We embed their lived experience at the heart of everything we do to provide exciting opportunities to get involved in co-producing our projects and services as well as co-developing campaigns to amplify their voices to inspire meaningful change.

OUR VISION

To make Scotland a place where all children & young people from armed forces and veteran families are listened to, their rights are upheld, and empowered to realise their potential and thrive.

SECTION ONE: REFLECTING ON THE JOURNEY SO FAR

Our journey to achieving our mission continues to gather momentum.



A welcome from Josh

“My name is Josh and I’m from an army family, I’ve lived in Scotland and Canada, and in Canada the education system is very different, even the way the day is structured is unlike Scotland! Having a different accent from other people in school made me popular but also they found it hard to understand me sometimes! I moved back to Scotland during the COVID-19 Pandemic so that was hard! I did though manage to meet up with some people I knew from primary school. If I’d been in Scotland throughout my education, I think I’d have been in a better spot about knowing what I wanted to do and learn when I came back to Scotland.

Being involved in projects with Forces Children Scotland has given me a sense of purpose – doing something that will eventually make a difference to children and young people like me. So that they don’t have to go through what I did, and they get better support means a lot to me. I found out about Forces Children Scotland through something my brother had gotten involved with through his youth club. I was looking for something to do so thought I’d volunteer. I attended a residential where we developed some resources to help teachers understand what we go through and also one where we learned how to make

some mini-documentaries. I also represented young people from Scotland in the MoD Tri-service youth voice group. The highlight for me was doing the mini-documentary making, I really enjoyed that and making the recordings that have been shown on Forces Children Scotland’s social media. I think other young people will see them and see that there’s someone there that they can connect with, and parents will see the video clips and check in with their child to see how they’re doing.

If Forces Children Scotland received a million pounds, I think the money should be spent on having more residential and get-togethers for young people. The more residential there are the more ideas come out of them from young people and the better it will be for young people from forces families. Being involved with Forces Children Scotland has made me more confident, I’ve got to experience in front and behind-camera work and had the chance to think about what might help other young people like me. I think more young people should get involved in the activities I have with Forces Children Scotland, step out of your comfort zone, and get involved – it makes a difference to your confidence!”



A welcome from Harvey Tilley and Max Young, Co-Chairs of Forces Children Scotland

“Despite the various challenges such as the recovery from the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and difficult operating environment, Forces Children Scotland continues to go from strength to strength. Over the past year we have continued to solidify our place in the fabric of the Armed Forces community in Scotland and more widely. We have been exceptionally lucky to have such contributors to the development of this impact report as Josh, Laura, Imogen, Sophia and Izzy that eloquently demonstrate the real-life positive change that the work we do has on young people in our community. We have worked extremely hard to deliver our co-produced strategy enhancing the leadership role we play in the public and voluntary sector to this very specific group of people. As a consequence, it is really starting to bear fruit with colleagues playing a vital role in Government working groups alongside the publication of our report, looking at forces life through a children’s rights lens, and our resource pack to support ‘The Month of the Military Child’.

We continue to grow our reach through our various partnerships and collect evidence to influence change. At the centre of this, is bringing lived experience with the critical voice of young people to ensure they feel heard, respected, valued and empowered to everything we do, which is shown throughout this report and the work carried out on their behalf. Our Impact Report shows the real difference we have made in children and young people’s lives, while also continuing to develop our plans for future. This will be used in the creation of our new strategy in 2024/25 to carry us forward. The impact achieved is testimony to the passion and commitment of our amazing staff and Trustees and, of course, the incredible children and young people who worked alongside us on multiple projects, and who will always remain the reason our charity exists. We the Co-Chairs of this incredible organisation commend this Impact Report and look forward to working in partnership with everyone to continue our work improving the lives of children and young people.



Our strategic mission

Our mission focuses on six strategic priorities to realise our vision:



Lead the sector

Developing collaboration and strategic partnerships across the sector to ensure children and young people from forces families are considered as a distinct group in policies and practice to improve their outcomes.



Enhancing our reach

Increasing our engagement and visibility to reach greater numbers of children and young people, intervene earlier, and increase understanding of their needs with those supporting them or making important decisions on their behalf.



Young people’s voices

Amplifying lived experiences of children and young people, ensuring they feel heard, valued, and empowered to engage directly with those making decisions that affect their lives.



Influence

Shaping the future policy landscape concerning children and young people from armed forces communities and delivering learning and development opportunities to support understanding across the sector of their needs.



Partnerships

We will build partnerships across all areas of our work to achieve improved collective impact across the sector in meeting the unique support needs of children and young people from armed forces communities.



Evidence-based

Building capacity to measure outcomes and impact across all our work, contributing to the evidence base to influence change, with due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Reflection | Resilience

We are mindful of continued unprecedented global challenges and profound change as our journey progresses.

We have remained steadfast in our mission to ensure Scotland is a place where over 13,000 forces children and young people can overcome many unique challenges to realise their potential and thrive during what continues to prove unprecedented times. The ongoing repercussions of the COVID-19 Pandemic have continued to reverberate for many children and young people. This has ranged from adapting to evolving educational and social needs, to increased demand for mental health services, and much more. We understand that children and young people from these communities already face many unique stressors because of forces life. Conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East have heightened global geopolitical tensions, reminding us of the ever-present realities of military service and the potential for rapid deployment. This backdrop has created an environment where the needs of forces children are even more pronounced, necessitating robust and responsive support mechanisms. Further reviews of defence and rapid response capabilities have served to deepen uncertainties due to prolonged separations, disruptions in routine, and the shifting demands on their parents who serve. We have intensified our efforts to provide adaptable, personalised, and comprehensive support, ensuring that children and young people from armed forces communities feel listened to, supported, and empowered to thrive. We continue to co-produce projects, services, and campaigns to meet evolving needs and address issues such as mental health, learning, and social integration, while also advocating for meaningful change at a local, regional, and national level in Scotland and the United Kingdom.



Reflection | Achievement

Together, we have achieved so much on our journey. We are proud to share our recent highlights with you in this impact report.

Reflecting on what's been said, and on wider unprecedented challenges faced within the third sector right now, we are excited to share so many milestones achieved across our six strategic priorities.

We have reached and supported greater numbers of children and young people from armed forces communities to help build confidence, develop new skills, expand future horizons, and forge new connections. We have made progress in extending our reach by engaging greater numbers of primary school and early years-aged children to understand their unique support and transitional needs. We continue to provide professional help in understanding and overcoming mental health and wellbeing challenges through bespoke face-to-face and digital support services. We have amplified the voice and lived experience of children and young people louder than ever through the launch of innovative projects and campaigns to enhance empathy and understanding.

We are now on the radar of greater numbers of policymakers to advocate for meaningful change and greater participation in future influencing and policymaking. Much of what we have achieved this year has served to enhance our evidence base which informs our decision-making and improves service provision. Better still, our evidence base is shared through the development of learning opportunities,

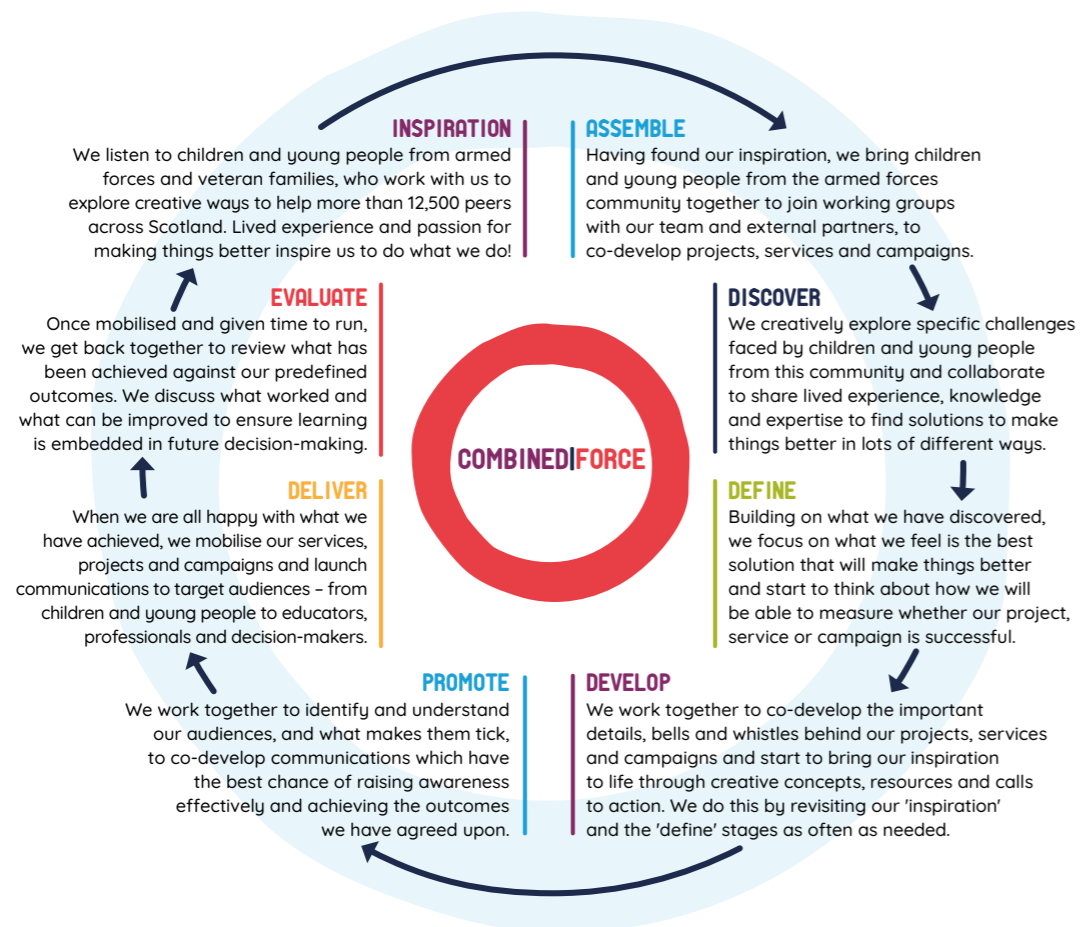
resources, and engagements across military and professional sectors to influence wider meaningful change. We have achieved many milestones, thanks to generous support from a variety of funders. We wish to express our gratitude to The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, The Veterans Foundation, The Scottish Children's Lottery, The Paul Hamlyn Foundation, The Army Benevolent Fund, and The Scottish Veterans Fund. We also wish to thank all individuals, community groups, and businesses that have generously supported Forces Children Scotland through donations, challenge, community and corporate fundraising.



Co-production | Working with children and young people

We put the lived experience of children and young people from armed forces communities at the heart of our journey to achieving our mission.

We continue to work directly with children and young people through our ‘Combined|Force’ methodology. Co-producing our projects, services, and campaigns promotes their human rights and proves highly effective in fostering a sense of ownership, empowerment, and confidence. They feel listened to and know that their contributions are valued to deliver innovative, relevant, tailored, and effective outputs to meet unique support needs. Children and young people tell us that it has helped them to develop a stronger affinity with our charity, as well as developing valuable transferrable skills, including problem-solving, decision-making, and teamwork that have strengthened personal statements and CVs.



SECTION TWO: IMPROVING HOW WE MEASURE THE IMPACT OF OUR WORK

We have improved how we record and evaluate impact to enhance our evidence base.



Measuring Impact | Developing an outcomes framework

We are enhancing ways to track progress, develop our evidence base, and demonstrate the value of our work.

Our senior team received training from Evaluation Support Scotland to lead a process of developing an outcomes framework for Forces Children Scotland. Since then, our team has received an introduction to outcomes, indicators, and measurement tools. They have contributed their respective knowledge, skills, and experience to develop specific outcomes, indicators, and measurement tools to evidence the impact of all our work. This piece of work is crucial for various reasons. It will enhance our ability to clearly define and articulate the changes we seek to achieve through our five service strands. In identifying specific, measurable outcomes, we can evaluate our effectiveness based on actual impact and demonstrated success rather than just describing our outputs or activities. We will track progress and adapt our strategies based on what is or isn't working. This continuous learning process helps in refining approaches to achieve better results for those we work with and, in many cases, external partners and funders too. Finally, we attain greater accountability for our commitments by establishing clear benchmarks for success, which can be used to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of our work.

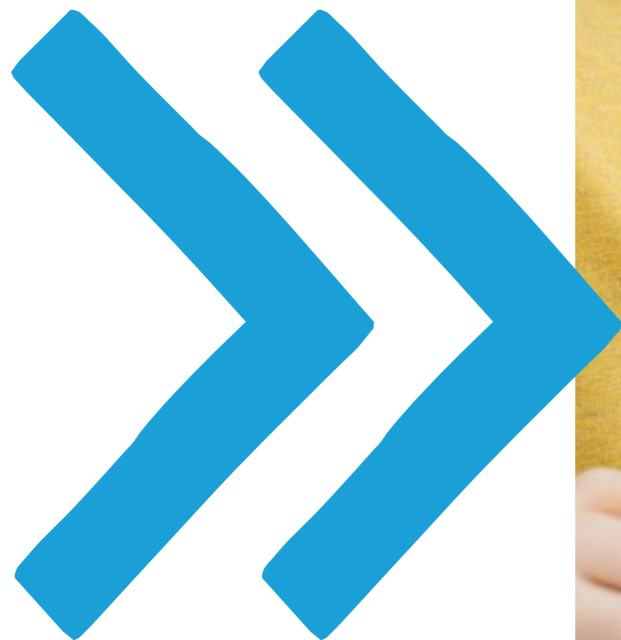
By clearly showing the outcomes achieved, we can demonstrate the value of our work to current and potential donors and partners. This is critical in a competitive funding environment where resources are often allocated based on impact. It also ensures that everyone in our organisation, from leadership to frontline staff, is aligned with the same goals and working towards the same outcomes and, ultimately, our mission.





Measuring Impact | Lamplight

Implementing our present strategic plan has meant we have continued to develop and refine how we record our data and measure impact. Lamplight, our case management software, has been a key part of that. This is our first full year of using this database across the organisation and we were able to use the results to report our successes to funders, supporters, and stakeholders. As our outcomes framework further develops, we will adjust Lamplight to capture all the necessary information to measure progress against those outcomes. This will allow us to continue to build on the foundation of data we have collected in Lamplight this year and make sure we can demonstrate that we are on track to achieve our strategic aims and improve outcomes for those we work with.



SECTION THREE: BUILDING MOMENTUM THROUGH PROJECTS, SERVICES, AND CAMPAIGNS

We have achieved lots of milestones as we progress on our journey.



Project Highlight | Tornado of Change

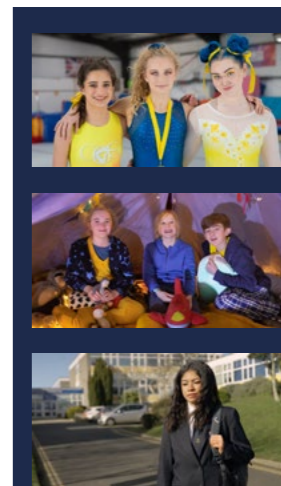
Have you ever felt powerless in the face of change, anxious about what lies ahead, or lost and alone in a new place?

Did you know that 15,000 men and women leave the British Armed Forces every year?

When parents leave the armed forces it can feel like a tornado of change for their children. Some of these children put their lived experience at the heart of three short videos to help enhance empathy and understanding in others.

While some children make a smooth change to civilian life with their families, it can prove a worrying, overwhelming, and disorientating experience for others, often leading to moving school, and leaving communities of support, whilst feeling an acute sense of loss concerning identity, friendships, and much more.

Funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Army Benevolent Fund enabled us to work with children and young people and Effervescent UK, to co-develop the short videos. We brought the group together for a seven-day creative residential in Edinburgh to find the all-important creative spark. We then came back together regularly online to refine our creative spark focusing on three specific themes; feeling powerless in the face of change, anxious about what lies ahead, and being lost and alone in a new place. We then co-developed specific narratives, scripts, and much more to bring the creative spark to life. Having launched, the videos call on several audiences to find out more about what they can do to help make the transition easier.



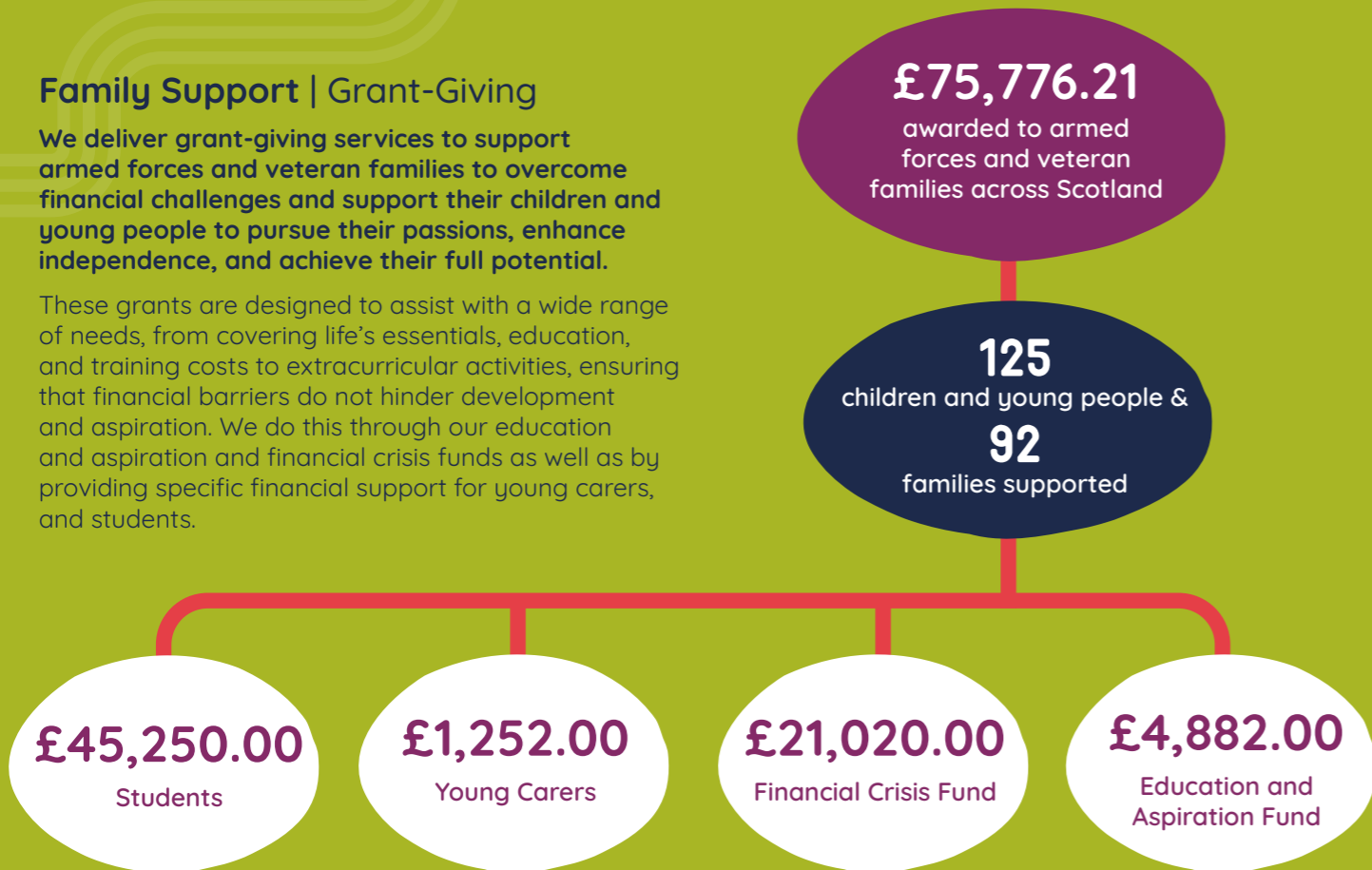
VISIT OUR PROJECT WEBPAGE

“It’s so good knowing that sharing my experience has delivered something that makes it clear what it feels like to change from military to civilian life and encourage civilians to do something to help make things easier for young people in the future.” Sophia

Family Support | Grant-Giving

We deliver grant-giving services to support armed forces and veteran families to overcome financial challenges and support their children and young people to pursue their passions, enhance independence, and achieve their full potential.

These grants are designed to assist with a wide range of needs, from covering life's essentials, education, and training costs to extracurricular activities, ensuring that financial barriers do not hinder development and aspiration. We do this through our education and aspiration and financial crisis funds as well as by providing specific financial support for young carers, and students.



What our Family Support Team had to say about this year

“This year, we successfully ran our college and university grant programme once again. We were happy to support 33 young people from both serving and veteran families in pursuing their higher education goals. Applicants pursued qualifications across a range of disciplines, including Business Management, Psychology, Mathematics, Professional Dance, Outdoor Leadership, and Computer Games Application Development. Many of our grant recipients have received our financial assistance throughout their degree and we are very proud to have made a positive impact on their financial health during their studies”.

Laura's Story

Laura (15) has autism and impaired hearing and supports her mother, a Royal Navy veteran, who has complex medical conditions. Laura takes on further responsibility when her father, who currently serves in the Royal Navy, is deployed at sea. Normally, her dad takes her on holiday over the summer; however, this year he was on active duty, so a grant was awarded for her to attend a week-long outward bound residential to engage with fellow young people, have some fun, and have some respite from her caring responsibilities

Imogen's Story

Forces Children Scotland helped Imogen make her international lacrosse debut by contributing to her self-funded trip to Prague to represent Scotland at the European Championships earlier this year. Funds were also awarded to help Imogen travel to Hong Kong to compete at the World Lacrosse Championships. Lacrosse is a sport that Imogen describes as ‘fast, competitive and team-orientated’ and its popularity continues to grow in Scotland.

“The grant from the Forces Children Scotland has made a huge difference to me. Both the European Championships and the World Championships were self-funded; hence every contribution is so important. Thank you so much!”



READ IMOGEN'S FULL STORY





Event Spotlight | Scottish Parliamentary Reception

Amplifying the voice of children and young people from armed forces communities louder than ever before.

Over seventy-five children, young people, and adults, including policymakers, educators, and professionals, attended our reception to celebrate the launch of our Forces Life Board Game and Comic Book. The event was generously sponsored by Alexander Stewart MSP MBE, who also submitted a motion of support for the project at Holyrood. Speaking at the beginning of the event, Alexander commended the young people and team involved in the making of the board game and comic book who reinforced the importance of partnering with children and young people in developing impactful projects, services, and campaigns. Cadence and Grace were part of the working group for the board game and comic book, which was funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, and the Army Benevolent Fund. They joined team members to deliver a short panel discussion to provide further insight into the co-production process to make incredible things happen.

Attention then turned to our Tornado of Change videos with Sophia and Heather, who shared emotive stories about making the change from military to civilian life with their families, the co-production process, and how they hoped the videos would help others to better understand what it's like to make this important change.

“It was a really fun experience to talk about co-producing the board game and comic book, and a great way to showcase and explain all of the further work that has taken place recently.” Cadence

“Forces Children Scotland has given me amazing experiences, such as this event, that I wouldn't have elsewhere. It felt good to have my voice heard.” Sophia

Having recently launched our Influencing Strategy, our Chief Executive Officer, Laura Falconer introduced our five policy calls to make Scotland a place to realise potential and thrive. She described the positives and challenges of forces life experienced by children and young people across Scotland, and the importance of listening to the voice of this community to respond with tailored services, co-designed to meet unique support needs.

“I hope hearing the lived experience of our young people, who so eloquently shared their stories, helped spread a greater understanding of the reality of being part of a military family for many. We hope the clear policy calls within our Influencing Strategy demonstrate what needs to change to improve outcomes for this seldom-heard group of children and young people.”

Laura Falconer



“The event was inspiring on so many fronts from tabletop presentations to the short videos and presentations from the young people. It was also encouraging to see so many elected representatives taking an interest and getting involved in discussion with your staff; just need to turn the discussion to action.” Attendee



Youth Participation

We empower children and young people from armed forces families to have a voice in shaping the services and support they receive. We also deliver youth forums and residential experiences to build confidence, develop skills, and forge friendships.

We encourage active involvement, where children and young people share their experiences, ideas, and perspectives on topics that matter to them. Through workshops, forums, and collaborative projects, we ensure that their voices are heard and given due weight, fostering leadership skills and promoting positive change within their communities. We provide a vital platform for these young people to influence decisions that directly impact their lives.

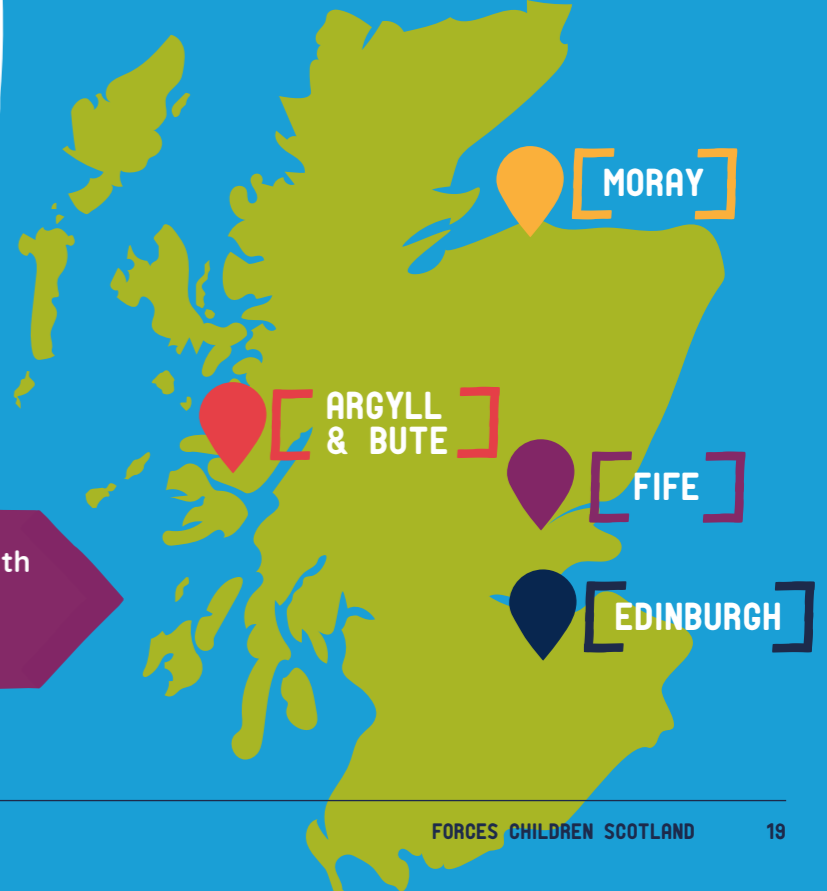


“As a group, we got so much work done that will hopefully be really beneficial for other young people from forces families – everyone should be very proud of themselves. Overall it was an absolutely amazing week filled with lots of fun-based activities and laughter. It was so lovely meeting new people as well as catching up with old friends.” Izzy

What our Youth Participation Team had to say about this year

“This year’s highlights include co-delivering a workshop with young people at the SciP Alliance’s annual conference. Young people shared their experiences of working with us in creative ways to bring their voices to our work. The dedication of young people in our forum groups was recognised in their nomination as ‘Advocates of the Year’ in the Celebrating Forces Families annual award. The group were finalists, and a young person joined our Participation Manager at the awards event in London. Finally, this year saw Forces Children Scotland become Associate Members with the Scottish Youth Parliament opening a wealth of opportunities for children and young people to be heard.”

Where most of our youth participation activities have taken place.





Project Highlight | Influencing Strategy

A strategic vision advocating for and addressing the unique needs of children and young people from armed forces communities.

We worked with a group of young people from armed forces and veteran families to co-produce and launch our influencing strategy, titled 'A Force for Meaningful Change'.

Representing a significant milestone in our policy work, we took to the idyllic setting of the Scottish Highlands for two creative residential sessions. Applying the role of rights detectives and scientists to explore many unique challenges faced by forces children, they came up with proactive solutions on many topics, including education and learning, mental health and wellbeing, and making the change from military to civilian life. To achieve the solutions, the team identified seven organisational tools and developed the series of calls-to-actions that you can see below. It didn't prove all work and no fun - to support all the serious stuff, young people participated in digital treasure hunts, orienteering activities, mock media interviews, and much more to bring the subject and tasks to life. Better still, new friendships were forged through sports and activities, films, and lots of hot chocolate, pizza, and Haribo.

Our five policy themes:

THEME 1: A STRONG EVIDENCE BASE

THEME 2: UPHOLDING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

THEME 3: POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

THEME 4: A THRIVING EDUCATION

THEME 5: SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE



VISIT OUR STRATEGY WEBPAGE



Our launch was supported by five blogs from policymakers, strategic partners, and the team focusing on each of our five strategy themes.



Susie Hamilton
Scottish Veterans Commissioner

[Read Susie's blog](#)



Katherine Lawrence
SciP Alliance

[Read Katherine's blog](#)



Dr Paul Watson
Northumbria University

[Read Paul's blog](#)



Martin Whitefiled MSP

[Read Martin's blog](#)



Robyn Pattinson
Forces Children Scotland Policy Officer

[Read Robyn's blog](#)

Mental health and wellbeing

We deliver mental health and wellbeing services tailored for children and young people from armed forces communities. Better still, we work with this community to co-produce resources to help over 13,000 peers across Scotland and beyond.

We recognise the unique challenges faced by these children, such as frequent relocations and involuntary separation due to parental deployment. We offer professional and compassionate support to help navigate specific challenges. Through one-to-one sessions, peer and drop-in support, and wider activities, we aim to enhance understanding of mental health and wellbeing topics and to introduce effective coping strategies and wider interventions when required.



What our Mental Health and Wellbeing Team had to say about the year

The Your Mind Matters (YMM) service during 2023-24 primarily focused on maintaining and improving on the existing wellbeing work being carried out, predominantly within Hermitage Academy. One of the highlights of the service during this time was the working partnerships created whilst working within the school and the wider Helensburgh community, attending various events including the HMB Clyde Families Day at the Drumfork Centre. The YMM service also worked to create a new section of the YMM hub which focuses on wellbeing materials for primary-school aged children through a series of videos and printable resources.

[Visit our Your Mind Matters Hub](#)



Your Mind Matters delivers face-to-face and digital mental health support in the West of Scotland and the Your Mind Matters Hub.



- 27** children and young people supported through one-to-one sessions
- 12** children and young people engaged in peer and drop-in sessions
- 80** children and young people attended school-based wellbeing lessons
- 10** mental health and wellbeing resources co-produced

Over **92%** of pupils who completed a minimum block of six weeks of one-to-one support through our Your Mind Matters Project have seen an improvement in their wellbeing using internationally recognised assessment tools.

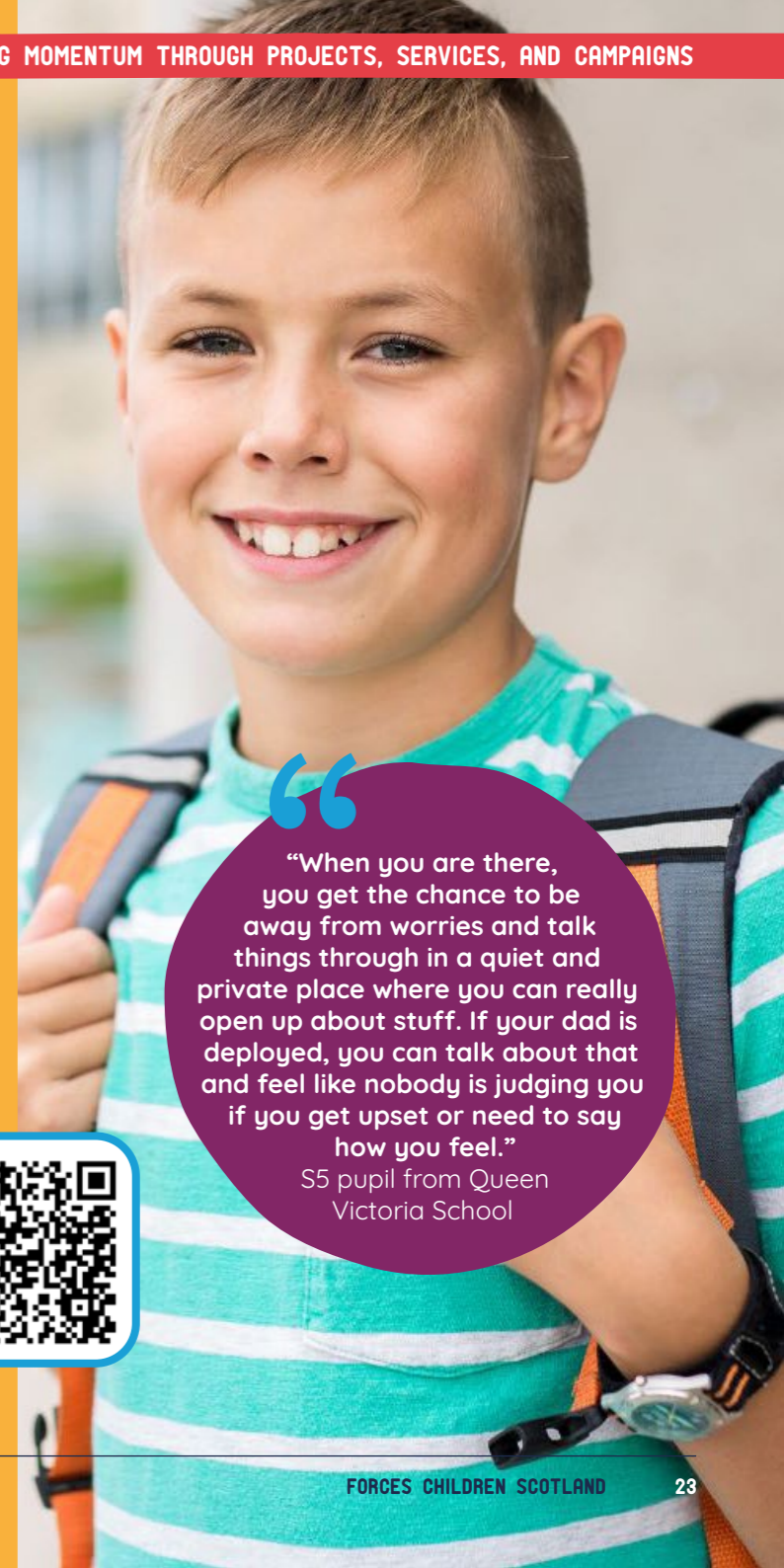
The Lighthouse Project works in partnership with Queen Victoria School in Dunblane, to deliver face-to-face mental health and wellbeing support to pupils from armed forces communities.



- 25** children and young people supported through one-to-one sessions
- 36** children and young people engaged in peer sessions
- 30** mental health and wellbeing drop-in sessions delivered

92% of pupils who received one-to-one support had improved mental health and wellbeing outcomes compared to their previously recorded levels. **96%** of pupils who attended peer support and drop-in sessions stated the sessions had positively influenced their abilities to adopt effective strategies to address mental health and wellbeing challenges.

Listen to Lilly-Grace talk about the support received through the Lighthouse Project, its positive impact, and why it's so important to have support in place



“When you are there, you get the chance to be away from worries and talk things through in a quiet and private place where you can really open up about stuff. If your dad is deployed, you can talk about that and feel like nobody is judging you if you get upset or need to say how you feel.”
S5 pupil from Queen Victoria School



Event Spotlight | Documentary Making Residential

Forces life through a creative lens

Forces Children Scotland delivered a three-day creative documentary-making residential in partnership with creative agency, Rebel Loop Studios.

We brought a group of young people from across Scotland to Glasgow for a series of workshops that introduced storyboarding, scripting, mobile phone, and camera recording techniques, and much more. With the basics grasped, we progressed to learn how to conduct one-to-one interviews and frame specific shots. Then, we had an opportunity to put everything into practice through fun-based group recording projects. Having generated lots of fantastic content, the residential closed with a workshop about how to edit footage into a professional final cut. Having completed the residential, the young people involved will take their newfound knowledge, skills, and confidence to develop a series of mini-documentaries to welcome peers moving to their local community by showcasing things to do, places to go, schools, transport links, and much more.



READ MORE



“I had an absolutely amazing week with Forces Children Scotland and Rebel Loop Studios. As a group, we got so much work done that will hopefully be beneficial for other young people from forces families - everyone should be very proud of themselves. Overall, it was an absolutely amazing week filled with lots of fun-based activities and laughter. It was so lovely meeting new people as well as catching up with old friends.”

Residential attendee



“It’s clear from the feedback young people have provided that our creative residential has proved a resounding success - equally, it’s been great to observe young people develop new skills, build confidence and, most importantly, have fun throughout the three days. We live in an accelerated culture and the world of digital communication is at the heart of most of our lives, in some shape or form; therefore, it’s never been more important than right now to be able to communicate effectively through digital formats.

Documentary-making is a very powerful, emotive mode of communication, perfect for sharing lived experience and engaging audiences like those our young people will aim to reach through their creative projects. Having seen the high quality of what the young people have created through this residential, it’s very exciting to consider how they will take things further to create their mini-documentaries to help peers make the move to their communities a little easier.”

Forces Children Scotland team



WATCH OUR FILM

HEAR FROM JOSH

HEAR FROM IZZY

Influencing & Policy

We are dedicated to advocating for the unique support needs and upholding the rights of children and young people from armed forces communities across Scotland and the UK.

By engaging with policymakers, the Ministry of Defence, public and government bodies, and wider key stakeholders, we work to ensure that the unique challenges faced by this community are recognised and addressed in national, regional, and local policies and practices. Through consultation, sharing lived experience and campaigning, we strive to achieve meaningful systemic change, helping to shape a supportive environment where children and young understand their rights and the duty bearers protect and promote them.



What our Influencing and Policy Team had to say about the year

“Policy and Influencing has had a successful year. Our parliamentary event was a huge success with many attendees commenting on how informative it was. The young people in attendance did extremely well speaking on their experiences as a child in an armed forces or veteran family and the work they have done with Forces Children Scotland. The event led to many successful connections being made with MSPs and the Ministry of Defence. We have built on these connections and continue to amplify the voices of children and young people from armed forces families. We also co-produced our Influencing Strategy with young people and look forward to achieving its calls.”



3 Scottish & UK Government Consultation responses (Human Rights Bill, National Outcomes Consultation, Supporting Our Veterans: A Consultation).



2 Scottish Parliamentary inquiries submitted (Addressing child poverty through parental employment, Your views on Additional Support for Learning (ASL) in Scotland).



9 MSPs and wider policymakers engaged (Martin Whitfield, Jackson Carlaw, Alexander Stewart MSP, Sarah Boyack, Pam Gosal, Sharon Downey, Tess White, Roz McCall, Jeremy Balfour, Susie Hamilton – Scottish Veterans Commissioner, and the Children and Young People’s Commissioner for Scotland).

[Visit our Influencing and Policy webpage](#)

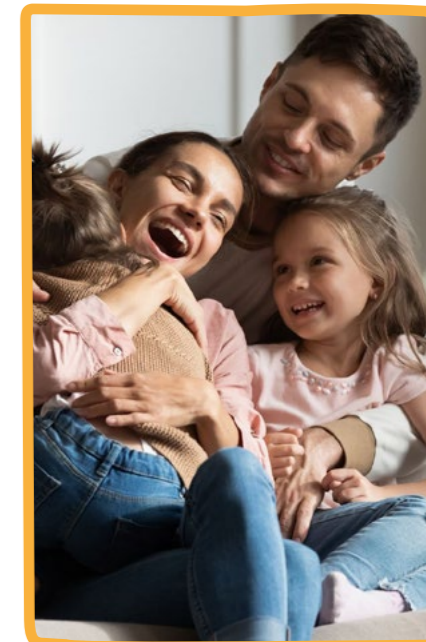


Emerging Project | Future Transactions

We have listened to the voices of children, young people, and their parents when it comes to getting financially prepared for civilian life.

Funding from The Scottish Veterans Fund enabled Forces Children Scotland to deliver a crucial initiative providing tailored financial advice, information, and guidance for families when the time comes to leave the armed forces.

We have listened to families in making this project happen, responding to the cost of living crisis and growing demand for support for financial support. Over the past year, we have seen over 29% more applications, compared to the previous year. Of that number, we have seen a 10% rise in families reporting significant debt. In response, we have increased our grant spending by 15% to meet the rising applications received which, in turn, is supporting a 46% increase in children and young people from veteran families facing the impact of financial hardship. The project covers many important topics, from housing, energy, and avoiding debt, to making the most of your savings, benefit entitlements and so much more. By equipping families with the knowledge and tools they need, the project helps ensure financial stability making the transition to civilian life easier by fostering a smoother adjustment.



Do you know what the average monthly rent is in Scotland?

Future Transactions offers an interactive financial readiness quiz where families can test their financial knowledge on a range of relevant topics and a series of podcasts from veterans and agencies highlighting vital support services.

[Visit our Future Transactions Project webpage](#)



“My parents can’t cope with real-life situations because they’ve not had a life outside the Armed forces.”



Learning & Development

We are committed to supporting professionals to better understand and address the unique needs of pupils from armed forces communities across Scotland.

Our accredited training, resources, and consultancy, equips professionals and interested community members with the knowledge and skills needed to create inclusive and supportive relationships with forces children. By enhancing awareness of the challenges these children and young people may face, such as frequent relocations or parental deployment, we introduce effective strategies to ensure that they can thrive, regardless of their circumstances.

What our Learning and Development Team had to say about the year

“This year, we successfully designed and produced our current learning offer, creating seven new accredited modules to be delivered to professionals working with children and young people from armed forces families. We were excited to host several learning sessions across the year including our learning event at Hermitage Academy in November. During this session, our young people shared their strengths, challenges, and experiences of living in a forces family. Feedback from our learning session displayed an increased awareness of the lived experience of our children and young people. We are excited to continue developing our learning modules and offer more learning sessions online to various professionals across all sectors who have contact with forces children.”

Our Learning and Development worker developed our first Month of the Military Child Celebration Pack.

The pack included information about the Month of the Military Child, which takes place in April, and further insights about the armed forces community. The pack provided educators and professionals with a range of session ideas and signposting towards resources to help raise awareness of the initiatives. It highlighted the positives and challenges faced by forces children to foster understanding and support within their environments.



VISIT OUR
WEBPAGE

65

educators and professionals engaged through webinars & face-to-face sessions

8

CPD resources for educators and professionals were created

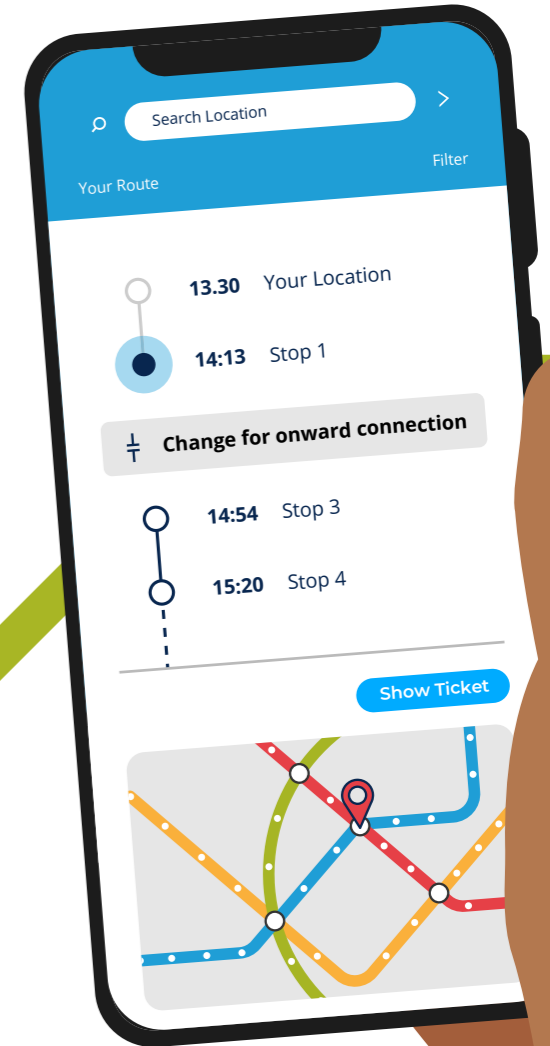
SECTION FOUR: WHAT LIES AHEAD ON OUR JOURNEY

Like many children and young people from armed forces communities, we are making an important transition in realising our vision.

Appointing a new Chief Executive Officer and co-developing a new, revitalised three-year strategy will represent a crucial next step in our journey towards making Scotland a place where all children and young people from armed forces communities can truly realise their potential and thrive. This transition will infuse our present mission with renewed energy, evidence, data and innovative thinking. It will allow us to more effectively address unique challenges and adapt to emerging opportunities to make collaborative impact across a range of sectors. All of which make it clear that as our present strategy draws to a close it doesn't signify that we have reached the terminus. It means we are preparing to make a scheduled stop to join our connection on the next stage of our journey.



We focus on looking ahead on our journey to achieving our mission..





» Lead the sector

Launching our influencing strategy is a great example of how we have continued to make progress in establishing a lead role in the sector, connecting policy and practice, encouraging third-sector partnerships, and facilitating sector improvements. We will continue to collaborate with policymakers and partners to ensure children and young people from armed forces and veteran families are considered, included, and identified as distinct groups in policies to support improved outcomes. We will continue to work with partners across organisational boundaries to facilitate change, including between adult and children's sectors. Exciting new work planned, including the co-production and launch of our children's rights report, will help in achieving this outcome.



» Enhancing our reach

Delivering our first Month of the Military Child campaign, and wider engagement activities, has helped to increase our visibility in armed forces communities so that families know who we are and what support we provide. The launch of our new learning offer, the Month of the Military Child Celebration Pack, and Advisory Service has helped to dramatically increase our reach in engaging those supporting or making important decisions on behalf of this community. We will take our Month of the Military Child campaign a step further next year through a series of roadshow events. We will extend our work to include earlier intervention for families, including developing family support models, training, and support in wider communities.



» Young people's voices

Building on all the great work achieved and celebrated in this year's impact report, we will continue to grow our youth participation work to represent the voices of more children and young people from armed forces communities. We will develop the capacity to deliver activities across Scotland to ensure we reach younger children, those between the ages of three and eleven, and those with Additional Support Needs (ASN). We will continue to provide a platform for forces children and young people to engage directly with decision-makers at all levels to positively shape policy, practice, and service delivery.



» Influence

As mentioned previously, launching our influencing strategy has proved to be the first step in helping to shape the future policy landscape concerning children and young people from armed forces communities, improving their visibility and influence, and we are excited to begin work on our forthcoming children's rights report. Having launched our new learning offer for educators and professionals, we will deliver our newly accredited CPD face-to-face and digital modules to further enhance understanding across the sector of the needs of those from this community.



» Partnerships

Many activities delivered this year have galvanised existing partnerships with organisations including the SCiP Alliance, Together: Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights, Ministry of Defence Community Teams, and many more. Moving forward, we will build upon existing partnerships and extend our networks further to achieve improved collective impact across all areas of our work. We will build partnerships to deliver in key areas, such as upstream prevention activities, supporting children in the early years, enhancing financial management skills, upholding children's rights, and enhancing sector-wide evidence base.



» Evidence-based

We have made fantastic progress regarding enhancing how we measure and communicate the impact of our projects, services, and campaigns in the future. We will use the data gathered through Lamplight to inform reporting and new service developments. All of this makes a significant contribution to widening our evidence base to influence greater change over the next year. We will also maintain oversight of good practice across all sectors supporting children and young people from armed forces communities across Scotland and will ensure the voice of lived experience underpins the development of further learning opportunities, resources, and future service delivery models.





Upcoming Project | Talking Mats

We have received a generous grant award from the Army Benevolent Fund to develop an innovative Talking Mats communications tool with, and for children from military families with additional support needs (ASN).

A Talking Mat is a visual communication framework that supports people with communication difficulties to express their feelings and views. Emerging research indicates significant numbers of children from armed forces communities receive little or no specialist support to overcome ASN challenges. Many of these children find adapting to change related to forces life and communicating its impact on them extremely challenging.

We will work with specialist social enterprise, Talking Mats Ltd, children, and young people to co-produce a forces-specific Talking Mat Visual Communication Tool – the first of its kind in the UK. Training will be delivered to upskill members of our team to roll out the communications tool across our various services. In the future, organisations holding a Talking Mat licence will be able to access our forces-specific communications tool to assist in their wider work supporting this community.



Upcoming Publication | Rights Report

We are looking at forces life through a children’s rights lens. We will launch our first-ever report to highlight the unique needs and challenges faced by children from armed forces families through a children’s rights lens.

Titled **‘It’s not just their job, it’s our whole lives’**, our report will be co-produced with children and young people from armed forces and veteran families across Scotland. The report will amplify their voice through a series of animations, quotes, and case studies, ensuring their perspectives and needs are at the heart of the report’s message. Through this innovative approach, children and young people highlight unique challenges faced in realising their human rights in areas such as education, mental health, parental separation, and social integration.



The report will be released in July 2024, to coincide with the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 commencement.





Upcoming Project | Deployment Pack

We will co-produce a digital deployment pack resource with and for children and young people from armed forces communities thanks to funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust and BFBS Big Salute.

Deployment can be a tough time for children and young people. The absence of a serving parent brings a range of emotions and difficulties, from anxiety and loneliness to managing an increase in daily responsibilities at home. The impact can be profound, and who better to understand these challenges than those who have lived through it? Young people will co-create a landing page on our website that can be accessed by children and young people from armed forces communities. Early discussions have indicated a preference to co-develop a deployment cycle rollercoaster resource to explain what deployment is in a child-friendly way and use the visual of a rollercoaster to help explain the different stages of the cycle. We will team up with Civic UK to start the exciting process of bringing our young people's experience of deployment to life.



Have we inspired you to explore ways we can work together?



Join our mission supporting over 13,000 children and young people from armed forces communities to realise their potential and thrive.

We can't achieve our mission and vision alone.

Do you support this community or make important decisions on their behalf?

Please consider working in partnership with us to make Scotland a place where all children and young people can realise their potential and thrive.

Contact us: admin@forceschildrenscotland.org.uk

There are so many ways to help us achieve our mission and vision by fundraising too.

Get in touch: fundraising@forceschildrenscotland.org.uk

LET'S BE SOCIAL

Follow us across our social media channels.



[@ForcesChildrenScotland](https://www.facebook.com/ForcesChildrenScotland)



[@forceschildrenscotland](https://www.instagram.com/forceschildrenscotland)



[@ForcesChildScot](https://www.x.com/ForcesChildScot)



[Linkedin.com/company/forces-children-scotland](https://www.linkedin.com/company/forces-children-scotland)



[@forces.children.scotland](https://www.tiktok.com/@forces.children.scotland)



[@ForcesChildrenScotland](https://www.youtube.com/ForcesChildrenScotland)



Thank you for reading our 2023-24 Impact Report!

Keep updated on our work by signing up to our monthly e-newsletter

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