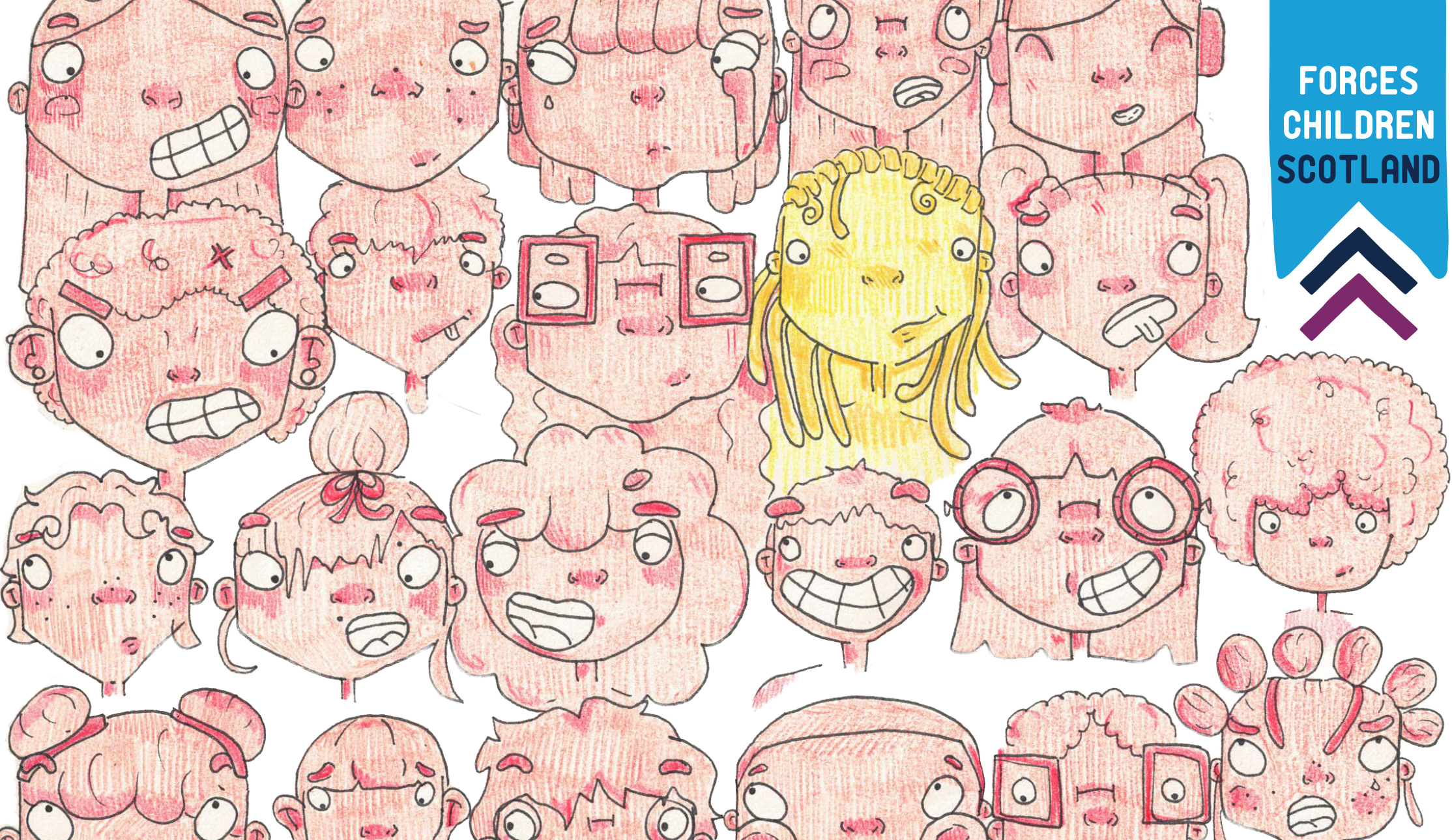


FORCES
CHILDREN
SCOTLAND



2024-2025 ANNUAL **IMPACT** REPORT

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

Thank you to the whole Armed Forces community for allowing us to proudly play our small part by supporting the babies, children and young people from forces families.

The activities and achievements documented in this impact report summarise the difference that our work has made from April 2024 to March 2025. This year saw us transition from delivering our previous three-year strategy, 'Step Change', towards a new strategic vision: 'HEAR. INVOLVE. SUPPORT.' This strategy was co-produced with children from forces families, our partners, staff team and trustees, officially launching in summer 2025.



“Hear Us, Involve Us, Support Us”. That has been the clear ask from those we support to all the adults in their lives. I am so proud of our fantastic team and the evidence in this report, which demonstrates how we are co-creating safe and inclusive spaces for views to be expressed, heard and acted upon; how we are sharing power in co-producing and co-designing solutions to influence change; how we are promoting youth leadership, upholding rights and improving wellbeing.

We recognise that to be the best version of ourselves, we need to be a happy, healthy and energised Forces Children Scotland, co-operating, co-ordinating and collaborating with those who share our mission and purpose.

The young people I have been fortunate to meet through our work are simply incredible. I am very excited for the future as our top team walk alongside them whilst they reach their potential and thrive.

— Steven Sweeney, CEO of Forces Children Scotland

A MESSAGE FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

Here are some reflections from two young people deeply involved in our projects and co-production work this year.

In 2024, a forces support worker at school encouraged me to attend Forces Children Scotland's residential. I arrived nervous but soon built strong friendships and felt able to share my story as a forces child. I'm so glad I took the plunge to apply for that place as I've been involved in so many different activities!

I met with Natalie Don-Innes, which made me feel recognised for my experiences and I also volunteered to attend the Scottish Youth Parliament sitting, where seeing young people debate real issues inspired me to join their online safety group. A highlight of all the things I've been involved in was the Rights Charter residential, where I opened up about my life and learned about my rights and how they connected to my forces life. I can't wait to see what other opportunities there are next year!

— Erin

Being part of the Forces Children Scotland forum has kept me busy this year! I've been involved in the development of the Forces Children's Rights Charter, volunteered to be on interview panels, shared my experiences and thoughts to co-produce the Talking Mats resource and made an animation at the summer residential. The highlight for me was visiting some of the local primary schools in my area. I loved making my weather map and supporting the children to make their maps and storyboards so that we heard about their experiences of belonging to a submariner family.

— Isla



WHAT WE DO

We provide support and opportunities to enable babies, children and young people from Regular, Reservist and Veteran families to realise their potential and thrive.

We work tri-service, and we are based in communities across Scotland while also offering digital support that can be accessed anywhere.

All our resources, services and support are co-produced with children from forces families.



OUR OUTCOMES

We measure our impact through a set of outcomes that reflect the real needs of babies, children and young people from forces families. These outcomes help us stay mission-driven while supporting evaluation and learning.

In the pages ahead, you'll see how our projects and activities over the past year have helped babies, children and young people feel more confident, connected and supported in their lives.

-  1 Improved emotional and social wellbeing and mental health
-  2 Improved educational engagement
-  3 Needs are better understood and represented in policy and practice
-  4 Improved financial health
-  5 Greater opportunity to engage in the community
-  6 More empowered to participate in decision making that affects their lives

IMPROVED EMOTIONAL, SOCIAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Over the past year, we have delivered a range of activities to promote health and wellbeing, helping children and young people navigate the unique challenges of forces life and build confidence and connection.

78 young people received one-to-one support, with all who were measured reporting an improvement in their clinical scores.

Young people experienced a 75% reduction in distressing thoughts and nervousness. Two in three reported feeling better able to cope when things go wrong, more confident in asking for help when needed, and more optimistic that their problems are becoming manageable.

The Your Mind Matters Wellbeing Hub had a wide reach, seeing **278 young people benefitting from on-demand resources** to support their wellbeing. Additionally, we distributed 200 Wellbeing Journals, designed specifically for young people from forces families to promote self-management and positive mental health.



THE LIGHTHOUSE PROJECT

The Lighthouse Project has been active at Queen Victoria School in Dunblane, Scotland's boarding school for children and young people from forces families. Our programme offered a combination of one-to-one support, peer support and mentorship, drop-in sessions, and lessons, all designed to cultivate emotional wellbeing and resilience.

Pupils told us they valued **"having someone to talk to,"** with many sharing how the sessions helped them in meaningful ways:

"I learnt about how to get better sleep."

"I learnt some coping techniques."

"They were helpful because I felt like I can open up about things more easily."

YOUR MIND MATTERS

Your Mind Matters delivered similar outcomes at Hermitage Academy, Drumfork Community Centre, and elsewhere in Helensburgh and Lomond, where many Royal Navy and Royal Marines families are based. With a focus on early intervention, the project supported a broad range of young people through one-to-one sessions, drop-ins and a lunch club.

Feedback from participants highlighted increased confidence, greater happiness and stronger friendships. The one-to-one sessions were particularly valuable in helping children and young people develop positive coping techniques for the challenges they face. Peer support opportunities enabled pupils struggling with friendships, particularly those transitioning to new schools, to feel more integrated, connected and supported within their school communities.

IMPROVED EDUCATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Many of our projects and activities take place in school settings, where children and young people tell us that education is about more than just schooling. For example, one pupil who received mental health support from us went from 50% to full-time school attendance, showing how positive educational outcomes follow from a foundation of wellbeing. We have worked proactively to create resources that support educational engagement by helping children and young people feel empowered and understood.

DEPLOYMENT ROLLERCOASTER

This year saw the launch of the Deployment Rollercoaster, **co-produced over 18 participation sessions in schools across Scotland and involving 139 young people from forces families.** The result is an interactive digital experience enabling young people to navigate their loved one's deployment.

The Deployment Rollercoaster features unique illustrations, commissioned from a young person to authentically reflect the emotions felt during the deployment cycle. We are grateful to Rubie McNeill for bringing Maude and the McLennan family to life.

So far, the resource has been accessed on 341 unique occasions by children, young people, parents, educators and partner agencies.



We expect many more to benefit from it in the future and are seeking to develop a similar resource for early learners. This resource will have an impact in educational settings and beyond. One young person involved in the co-production of the Deployment Rollercoaster shared her reflections:

"I hope that we can help young people, especially in armed forces families, not stress as much about their parent being deployed, and find interesting and useful ways to relieve some of that stress. I'm extremely excited to launch the Deployment Rollercoaster, as this will help others and teachers understand some of the challenges we go through as a forces family!"

CELEBRATING IZZY'S BRITISH CITIZEN YOUTH AWARD MEDAL OF HONOUR

We were proud to celebrate the incredible achievements of Isabella Turner, a Forces Children Scotland alum who took part in the co-production of several of our projects, including the Deployment Rollercoaster.

Izzy was among 21 recipients honoured with a British Citizen Youth Award Medal of Honour at The Palace of Westminster on 17 October. Reflecting on her involvement with our work, she shared:



"Truthfully, I feel working with Forces Children Scotland has strengthened my own relationship with the military environment as well as allowing me to develop a sense of pride and acceptance for where I feel I belong.

I think my work with FCS has helped me build a brighter future for myself as it has strengthened valuable life skills, I felt I was lacking in before. I was always an extremely shy child, but by getting involved with FCS, I've managed to find a way to come out of my own shell, strengthening both my teamwork skills, as well as my own individual abilities."

IMPROVED FINANCIAL HEALTH

With the cost of living as an ongoing challenge for forces families, we have offered financial support to help children and young people access the essentials and opportunities they need.

This year, our grants provided education costs, short breaks for young carers, access to hobbies, and other assistance. **In total, £95,445 was awarded, supporting 273 children and young people and their families:**



£42,000 contributing to living costs for university and college students



£41,705 in family support, including £8,500 distributed by SSAFA as part of their Christmas Support Fund



£8,200 providing school uniforms, supplies, and extracurricular activities



£2,240 supporting respite opportunities for young carers



£1,050 for after-school clubs



£250 for crisis intervention

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Feedback from young people demonstrates the impact of these grants:

“It has massively helped me afford more things for my studies and helped lift a weight of my shoulders.”

“The grant has been an extremely helpful bonus over the last three years, having that little extra bit of cash has helped me focus less on working and more on my studies.”

FUTURE TRANSACTIONS

We strengthened the financial wellbeing and readiness of children and young people from forces families through the Future Transactions project, delivering a programme of in-person sessions in partnership with Money Ready (formerly MyBnK), a financial education charity. Through this work, **141 young people gained increased confidence and capability in managing their money for financial independence.**

Additionally, we expanded our suite of online financial readiness resources, providing accessible help for all young people. This included continuing the Future Transactions podcast series, offering practical advice from expert partners while addressing issues and opportunities unique to forces life.

For example, we were joined by Edward Challis MBE, Project Lead for the NHS Scotland Armed Forces Talent Programme, to promote this career pathway to young people from forces families.

Together, these activities have improved young people’s financial health while preparing them to make informed financial decisions in the future.



REPRESENTING CHILDREN'S NEEDS IN POLICY

Ensuring that the voices of children and young people from forces families are heard and acted upon is a vital part of our mission. We have supported young people to speak directly to decision-makers and contributed to consultations, working groups and public forums, ensuring their needs are recognised in local and national policy.

In September, a tri-service group of six young people met with Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise Natalie Don-Innes. They raised concerns about forces children's experiences of the education system, the inconsistency of additional support and the patchy provision of childcare. The Minister followed up with a personal letter confirming the actions she had taken in response to this meeting.

Our policy team met with seven MSPs and MPs across the year to amplify the voices of children and young people, including MSPs Martin Whitfield, Paul Sweeney, Pam Gosal, and Jackie Dubar. Dubar led a parliamentary motion recognising the Month of the Military Child and championing our work.

A group of young people also took part in Young Carers Action Day at Holyrood, where they were greeted by First Minister John Swinney.



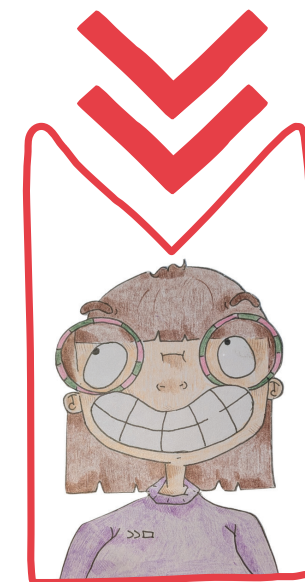
We submitted seven consultation responses and were active contributors to national working and advisory groups on educational transitions and research projects, as well as attending national conferences and workshops.

We continued to work in partnership with the forces sector and wider children's sector in Scotland. At the SCiP Alliance Conference in Cardiff, we delivered a workshop with two using interactive games like our snakes and ladders to explore forces children's rights. Our rights-based work was further recognised in Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)'s annual report 'State of Children's Rights', where forces children's voices were amplified in several sections of the report.

THE RIGHTS REPORT

Our influencing work is motivated by a commitment to advancing the rights of children from forces families. In July, we published **"It's not just their job, it's our whole lives"**, a co-produced report outlining how children's rights are affected by their loved one's service.

This report coincided with Scotland's incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into law and made several timely recommendations. It was mentioned in Scottish Parliament by Martin Whitfield MSP and Paul Sweeney MSP and quoted in the Children Young People's Commissioner Scotland's report on education.



UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S NEEDS IN PRACTICE

Through our learning and development programme, we engage with a wide range of professionals who support children from forces families. By strengthening their understanding of forces children's lives, we ensure they are better equipped to meet those needs within their respective professional settings.

Throughout this year, we delivered 10 Learning and Development events. Across these sessions, 85 attendees gained deeper insights into the experiences and perspectives of forces-connected children and young people.

We maintained an even balance of in-person and online delivery, fostering valuable face-to-face connection and discussion while also offering interactive webinars to enable wider access and participation.

The programme covered a broad range of key topics, including deployment, mobility, the transition to veteran status, the Armed Forces Covenant, and the challenges faced by young carers. These events not only increased participants' professional knowledge but also equipped them with practical strategies to better support children and young people in their daily practices.

IN-PERSON LEARNING AT COLINTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Over the course of four twilight sessions between November 2024 and May 2025, our Learning and Development Worker worked closely with educators at Colinton Primary School to deepen their understanding of the lives and experiences of babies, children and young people from Armed Forces families. We partnered with Colinton, which has a high percentage of serving families, to support their school improvement plan and increase parental engagement.

These educators brought openness, curiosity and a genuine drive to better understand the children they support, demonstrated throughout the various learning activities they participated in.

SEEING RESULTS

Participants in the Colinton programme described the sessions as **'very informative and delivered in an interesting and passionate way.'** En masse, they reported beginning with limited knowledge and leaving with a clear understanding of how mobility, deployment, separation and family transitions shape a child's experience.

Evaluating the programme, the educators shared that they now feel well prepared to recognise subtle patterns in children's behaviour, communicate with families in a sensitive way, and make thoughtful adjustments within the school environment to promote wellbeing and learning.

Participants appreciated the expertise and care evident in our approach. Our Learning and Development Worker drew on her experience as a teacher and a forces parent, enhancing the value of the learning modules with real-world insights. **100% of participants agreed that the sessions were led with clarity, empathy and expertise.**

This initiative demonstrates the potential of targeted professional development in bolstering the support available babies, children and young people from forces families. We have witnessed educators increase their knowledge and improve their practice. By establishing a foundation of understanding, professionals who engage with our learning and development programme can enhance outcomes for children and young people from forces families across all fields.



ENGAGING IN COMMUNITIES

We have facilitated meaningful opportunities for children and young people from forces families to connect with their peers and be understood in their wider communities.

This work has taken place in school settings in localities with a significant armed forces population, including Helensburgh and Moray. We have also brought young people together from across Scotland at residential programmes to share their experiences.

In April, we celebrated the Month of the Military Child with quizzes and creative bunting-making sessions in primary schools across the country, with 261 children attending.

During our Scotland-wide summer residential, thirteen young people enjoyed time with their peers while creating short films reflecting their experiences of forces life, in collaboration with a professional animator.



Additionally, two young people represented the interests of forces-connected children and young people at the Scottish Youth Parliament sittings in June and November. Our ongoing partnership with Scottish Youth Parliament offers young people a national platform to collaborate and advocate for their needs.

THE RUBY BOOTS PROJECT

The Ruby Boots Project has increased its momentum, with assemblies, peer support and other activities designed for children whose families are transitioning to civilian life. **In schools across Edinburgh and Fife, we delivered assemblies reaching 326 young people from both forces and civilian families, raising awareness about forces life and offering positive examples of how peers can support each other.**

To ensure the long-term success of the project, our Project Coordinator strengthened partnerships across local networks, including schools, universities and voluntary organisations. We prepared for the next phase of the project by recruiting and training volunteer buddies to lead peer support sessions.

Co-production remained central to our approach: 16 young people took part in workshops to define the buddy role and recruitment process.

Their input directly shaped how the next stage of Ruby Boots will operate, ensuring that the peer-support model reflects what young people say they need most.

This work has laid strong foundations for even greater impact next year, with the feedback from children and young people who were involved indicating the difference that Ruby Boots has already made on their wellbeing:

**“Feeling hopeful because there’s now
(hopefully) a solution to my anxiety”**

**“Feeling happy. Very good. Hope to do it again.
Very calming”**

“I had fun and learned lots.”

EMPOWERMENT IN DECISION MAKING

Our participation work has engaged children and young people from forces families, ensuring that their voices continue to shape our projects and influencing activities.

This year, 85 children and young people took part in the school sessions and residential delivered by our participation team, contributing to the development of the Deployment Rollercoaster, Talking Mats and other projects.

THE FORCES CHILDREN'S RIGHTS CHARTER

After the publication of the rights report, young people asked for a way to bring its findings to life and effect practical change. This sparked the creation of the Forces Children's Rights Charter, co-produced during this year with school-based activities and an intensive residential gathering the views of sixteen young people.



This process identified ten key provisions necessary for defending the rights of forces children and young people, grounded in the principles of the UNCRC and spanning all areas of life. This project culminated in the Rights Roundtable in April 2025, which brought young people face-to-face with policy shapers and decision-makers. Thanks to their collective efforts, the Rights Charter will shape our advocacy for years to come.

IMPACT OF THE CHARTER

Contributing to the Charter was significant for the young people involved:

“Being part of the Charter work was a truly rewarding experience, and I’m still really excited from the impact it had. I genuinely believe it has the potential to make a real difference in people’s lives, bringing a bit more ease and helping them to know what their rights are and how these may affect their daily struggles. Seeing the actual outcomes and hearing the feedback from those it touched left me feeling uplifted, knowing that collective efforts like these can ripple out and improve circumstances, no matter how small the shift might seem.”

TALKING MATS

In partnership with Talking Mats, a social enterprise offering innovative solutions for people with communication difficulties, we developed a bespoke visual communication framework to support children from forces families to express their feelings and views.

Through school support and awareness work, **85 young people participated in discovery workshops leading to the development of this resource.** As a result, children and young people who utilise Talking Mats have been able to express themselves more freely:

“It was good because you let me think about it and not just answer quickly. I felt like I wasn’t being judged.”



OUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY

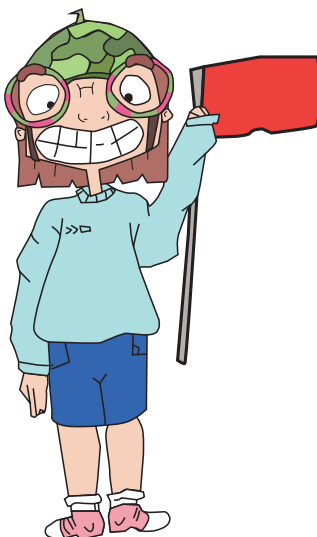
Forces Children Scotland is embedded in the Armed Forces community, and we are committed to contributing positively to all who serve or have served. Across our employment practices, partnerships, and community outreach, we continue to strengthen our connections to forces personnel, families, and the wider Armed Forces community.

FORCES-FRIENDLY EMPLOYMENT

We are proud signatories of the Armed Forces Covenant and holders of the Bronze Award in the Employer Recognition Scheme, with ambitions to progress to Silver and Gold recognition. As a forces-friendly employer, **two in three of our staff and trustees come from forces-connected backgrounds**, bringing lived experience that shapes our culture and the support we provide.

Sharing power with young people from forces families is integral to our recruitment process, ensuring the candidates we appoint align with our values and the needs of forces families. On some occasions, young people join staff on a single interview panel, and on others they hold their own panel with an agreed role as decision-makers. The appointment of Steven Sweeney as our CEO involved **four young people, representing tri-service and veteran families, forming an interview panel**, devising their own questions and contributing equally to the final decision. For one young person, **“It was a great responsibility to be given and I felt honoured to be involved, to feel valued and heard. It was an amazing opportunity and extremely rewarding.”**

We also achieved the Pride in Veterans Standard accreditation this year, demonstrating our commitment to LGBT+ veterans, serving personnel and their families. We have implemented policies and procedures to ensure that Forces Children Scotland models best practices in welcoming all forces families and responding to their needs with dignity and respect.



ENGAGING LOCALLY AND NATIONALLY

Across the year, we have been honoured to take part in milestones for the Armed Forces community, including Month of the Military Child, Armed Forces Day, and Remembrance Day. We also attended Lossie Fest at RAF Lossiemouth and community days in Helensburgh near the HMNB Clyde base, engaging with local forces families.

Building connections and sharing knowledge with the wider forces sector is a priority for our team. In February, **we delivered an interactive session bringing the Deployment Rollercoaster to the Highland Military Liaison Group** and encouraging meaningful reflection on separation and children's mental health. **The success of this activity led to a workshop for parents delivered in partnership with Reading Force**, showcasing supportive books and resources. Further online sessions with the Military Liaison Group and its partners cemented these efforts to bring an awareness of the unique needs of forces babies, children and young people to others working with forces families.

We also want to express our appreciation for individuals from the forces community who have contributed to our work as donors or fundraisers and help make our work possible.



OUR SUPPORTERS

We appreciate everyone who has made our work possible over the last year through their generosity and commitment to our cause. Thank you to our funders, partners and other supporters who share a vision of uplifting babies, children and young people from forces families. We would like to say a special thank you to Greenwich Hospital, strategic partners who have been vital to strengthening our support for Naval and Marine families.

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Thank you for providing the core funding that fuels our mission.



GREENWICH HOSPITAL

SUPPORTING THE ROYAL NAVY SINCE 1694

ABF

THE SOLDIERS'

CHARITY

PROJECT PARTNERS

Thank you for your help resourcing our activities and impact.

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SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT – SCOTTISH VETERANS FUND
SCOTTISH CHILDREN'S LOTTERY
THE MACROBERT TRUST
VETERANS FOUNDATION

MISSION PARTNERS

We are grateful for these cross-sector networks and organisations who share our goals and values.

ADES (ASSOCIATION OF DIRECTORS OF EDUCATION IN SCOTLAND)
CHILDREN IN SCOTLAND
COBSEO – THE CONFEDERATION OF SERVICE CHARITIES
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
SCOTTISH ARMED FORCES EDUCATION SUPPORT GROUP
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT
SCIP ALLIANCE
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TOGETHER (SCOTTISH ALLIANCE FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS)
TROOPR
UK GOVERNMENT
VETERANS SCOTLAND

THANK YOU FOR READING OUR 2024-2025 IMPACT REPORT!

We appreciate you taking the time to learn more about the difference our work has made for babies, children and young people from Regular, Reservist and Veteran families.

If you would like further information on any of the projects and activities included in this report, or if you're interested in contributing to our vital mission, please be in touch: admin@forceschildrenscotland.org.uk

You can keep up with us at:



Supporting armed forces
children & young people

www.forceschildrenscotland.org.uk

@ForcesChildrenScot

Forces Children Scotland (Operating name of the Royal Caledonian Education Trust) is a Scottish Charity, SC038722.

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EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME

BRONZE AWARD

Proudly supporting those who serve.



THE COVER ARTWORK AND OTHER
ILLUSTRATIONS USED IN THIS REPORT
HAVE BEEN CREATED BY RUBIE MCNEILL.