

The Right Turn Veteran-Specific Recovery Service Evaluation:

"It's not just about recovery"

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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**We all want to be
well and healthy,
but the system isn't
working for everyone.
Addaction finds ways
for people to thrive.**

**Together, we
change lives.**

Emotional Health

Friends & Family

Community

Growth & Learning

Physical Health



Executive summary

Each year roughly 17,000 people leave the UK Armed Forces and the vast majority make a successful transition into civilian society. A small but increasing number of ex-forces personnel however experience poor physical and mental health, substance misuse and/or come into contact with the criminal justice sector. Poor transition is estimated to have cost the UK £98 million in 2015 alone.

Addaction's Right Turn initiative is a pioneering project operating on the premise that the comradeship and mutual resilience underpinning military life can be re-directed to support recovery from addictions and desistance from crime journeys. The project utilises a model of peer support and assertive linkage facilitating engagement in meaningful social and community activities for veterans. We present the findings from the first ever study investigating the experiences of a small sample of UK veterans as they progress through this veteran-specific recovery project.



Methods

As the veteran cohort is a relatively new population area for evaluation research, this study is underpinned by the social identity theory framework, from which cohort relevant instruments and an integrated mixed methods approach were developed. The repeat data collection instruments designed include: a quantitative survey; qualitative episodic interviews; social identity mapping workshops; participative evaluation workshops; and an analysis of matched control groups' data. Base-line collection of data took place in 2015 and follow-up in 2016 with a total sample of 23 veterans.

Key messages

The three clear messages to policy-makers and practitioners working with veterans, from this evaluation research findings are:

- Veterans are more likely both to access and respond well to veteran-specific services in the first instance; this removes many of the common barriers to their engagement in services
- Consideration and valuing of the military identity in transition facilitates veterans' recognition of their own resilience, their own individual resources and their value to both veteran and civilian communities alike
- An holistic approach to supporting veterans can reduce the likelihood of: criminal justice contact; substance misuse; and further deterioration in mental and physical health; as well as addressing practical day-to-day issues, including social exclusion and emotional isolation

Key findings

On the basis of the sample data we observe the following positive impacts of project engagement for veterans of this target community specific delivery model in the:

Acknowledgement and building on of a military history

- 61% reported an improved sense of self-esteem/respect due to the recognition of their military service
- 83% of veterans cited the veteran-specific project element as both motivating initial recruitment and ensuring their commitment to continued attendance
- 83% of the sample describe the Right Turn project operating as a forum in which their military-conditioned-responses were both challenged and changed, e.g. not: communicating distress; asking for help; and talking about strong emotions.

Facilitation of social integration and increasing civic participation

- 96% of the veteran sample reported a renewed sense of belonging, which has facilitated a re-orientation and reconciliation within civilian society - evident in 70% of the sample
- When compared to the comparator matched sample data, the Right Turn group have relatively better physical and psychological health outcomes; veterans in the comparison sample not accessing the project experience significant deterioration in these outcomes

Significant behaviour change identified

- Of those with a history of contact with the criminal justice system, all reported no further criminal justice contact since joining the project
- Of the 39% of veterans in active addiction when joining the project, all gained addiction recovery status; the remaining 68% successfully maintained their existing recovery status.

Improvements in social participation and family relationships

- Two thirds of the veterans in the sample (65%) have subsequently undertaken further education and training opportunities and are now engaged in voluntary work or paid employment
- Project engagement facilitates significant reductions in social isolation; all participants reported wider social network contact and/or engagement in community activities
- 78% of veterans in the sample reported significant improvements in their relationships with family members since joining the project

Emergence of positive personal and social narratives

- 65% of veterans reported an increased sense of security and confidence in their management of practical, day-to-day matters, e.g. accommodation and finances
- Of the sample, 86% reported an improved sense of purpose and direction in life, alongside feeling more confident about achieving their life goals
- It is reported that the project provides a safe space where the awakening of hope and a more future orientated 'military veteran citizenship identity' can emerge

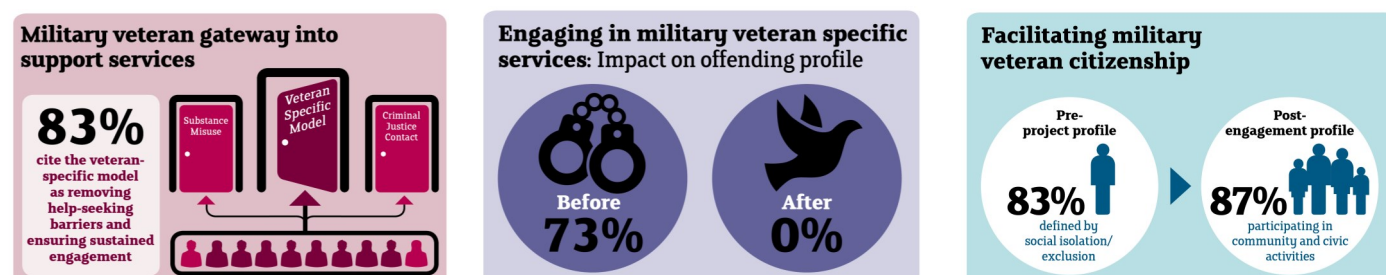
Key conclusions

The Right Turn veteran-specific project provides a culturally competent, holistic, collective identity-based pathway into support services for veterans. The positive impacts of this approach are demonstrated in full in the main findings report. This project is shown to deliver improvements in individual veterans' functioning and wellbeing and increases this cohort's social and community capital, thus aiding veteran integration into the local community and wider civilian society. This identity pathway delivery model operates throughout veterans' recovery journeys: as an attractor into support services; in enhancing their reciprocal commitment to continued engagement; and in facilitating the emergence of a transformed, but coherent and motivational, military veteran citizenship.

Key implications

Even after extended periods of time since leaving forces life, veterans face challenges in civilian society. However, given the appropriate support services, veterans can, not only address a history of substance misuse and criminal justice contact, but go on to become valuable community assets. The veterans in this study, through embracing an active military veteran citizenship, are also embracing their opportunities to contribute to their local civilian community and to raising and affirming the profile of the wider Armed Forces community in the UK.

The implicit strengths of the veteran community include comradeship and the mutual resilience which underpins military life. Support services which take a strengths-based - as opposed to deficit-based - and culturally competent approach to military identity must build on this veteran mutuality. The Right Turn model operates by re-awakening identification with *positive* military related traits, which empower and validate the transition environment to the benefit of veterans, their families, communities and wider UK society.



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"It's not just about recovery": The Right Turn Veteran-Specific Recovery Service Evaluation, Final report.

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