

The Impact Gallery - The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust Tackling Loneliness Project

A gallery of the excellent ways to tackle loneliness in the veteran and serving community.

Thank you to all of the grantholders for taking part and for all of the great work you have been doing !

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We Are In This Together

Getting veterans to open up through military history

NW
England

Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Getting veterans together over a shared connection like history helps to initiate conversations and form connections.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

That everyone likes the opportunity to learn more.



"These guys are an inspiration to all Veterans and they bring a smile to my face"
(Lewis, service user)

"Being a part of this project gives me purpose" (Ray, service user)

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Stronger Together

Supporting recently bereaved young people to build relationships with other bereaved children

Nationwide

Young people

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Having physical and virtual gatherings with young people who are the same age, this creates a safe space where they can bond over shared experiences.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

Gathering regular feedback from the young people has been essential for our success.



"I really like it when we get the chance to get together and talk about our day"
(Stronger Together service user)

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Social Sharks

Providing a setting for veterans to meet like minded people and create big social networks

NW
England

Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Offering a timetable of activities for all regardless of physical ability.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

The importance of embedding our work within the community and prioritising partnership work.



“With Covid, a lot of people like me were stuck in a hole. Because of the Hub, I am now finding myself again and meeting new friends. It's also given me the chance to show some of the other veterans my cooking skills.” (Mark, service user, 60)

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Forest Forces Tackling Loneliness Together

Delivering support and activities through the Nottingham Forest brand for all veterans

Midlands

Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Ensuring we have consistent and diverse activities available so that all veterans, regardless of age can get involved.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

Many organisations work in isolation and don't see the value of partnership working.



"The Trust has been excellent through Covid-times, and I'm thrilled to be back at the City Ground. Sessions like this remind you who you really are and has allowed some of us ladies to get our 'WAF-iness' back. Being with like-minded people gives you that reminder of the days in the Armed Forces. It never really leaves you. I love it." (Linda, service user)

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What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Having trainee befrienders has helped participants to build confidence and form real friendships.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

People can feel lonely for so many different reasons. It's not restricted to those who live alone.



“For the first time in months, I felt like I had a reason to get out of bed this morning”
(JM, A veteran affected by suicide)

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Women combating isolation through singing

Providing a lifeline for women to break down barriers and tackle loneliness

Nationwide

Family members

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Our choirs are open to all regardless of singing ability. The choirs are a safe judgement free space to form bonds and tackle loneliness.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

That networking with other grant recipients will be crucial to positive outcomes on this project.



“As a mother of three, with my husband away during lockdown, singing and socialising with my choir has been essential to my health, physically and mentally. Having contact and support from the choir, whilst through virtual means mostly, has brightened some dark times. I bring this home to my family, my joy for singing and the house feels lifted.” (Military Wives Choir Member)

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Caring with active confidence

Smashing through the challenging and relentless moments on a carers journey by getting people together every week

NE
England

Veteran
carers &
cared for
veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Working at the clients pace so we are there when they are ready to tackle issues.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

Use language carefully.. eg 'military community' is more effective for us than the word veteran as it is more inclusive.



“Getting moved into the bungalow means we can finally go outside. We even went for a walk around the town last week, met new people and chatted to our new neighbours.” (Alison)

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Believing a health crisis doesn't need to become a life crisis. A diagnosis needn't mean loneliness

Scotland

Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Our non-expert and friendly approach builds the veterans confidence and trust to engage in our project.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

Veterans can really connect and support one another over a Zoom screen!



"What's changed? Me. It's been about recognising I've got control over my choices. I choose to take it in baby steps and celebrate the small wins now. I'm committed to a positive future – I'm buzzing!"

(Building Connections service user)



Battlefields Uncovered online course

Building links via peoples shared interest in archaeology and learning

Nationwide

Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We have created a safe learning environment where veterans can openly share ideas and perspectives so that they feel heard.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

How common loneliness is within all people.



"I have gained so much knowledge.. They particularly inspired me to carry out further research on my own as we shared ideas and links in the comments offline. The timing of this course could not have been better as it alleviated a lot of the feelings of isolation." (Nicola, Battle Fields Uncovered course member)

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Comradeship circles

Empowering veterans to build social networks and long-lasting friendships

Scotland

Older veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We have no digital access barriers to participation. All the veterans need is a landline or mobile phone.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

The level of support that veterans can give to one another over the phone and the comradeship that develops.



"The highlight of my week and I really look forward to the chats" (Comradeship Circles service user)

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Armed Forces Reach Out Programme

Reducing isolation and building self-esteem through new friendships and activities

East Anglia

Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Our programme is led by veterans which has made service users more comfortable to join in.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

We have found that our veterans groups are more popular than expected.



"Great to connect with like-minded veterans from all services, in a friendly welcoming environment and feeling like part of the family again." (Norwich Military Veterans service user)

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What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We ensure there is a friendly atmosphere on calls (enabled by the facilitator) so it feels like old mates catching up.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

There is no such thing as a short telephone call.

Everyone has a story to tell, but not everyone has someone to hear it.



“Thank you so much for contacting me and enabling me to have a much-needed conversation. My husband passed away 26 years ago. The Royal Air Force means so much to me. Thank you for being there.” (Connections for Life service user)

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We Are Invictus

Connecting WIS veterans through peer to peer support via our virtual platform

Nationwide

WIS veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

The platform is WIS only so it's a safe zone for our members to communicate with one another.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

That the platform doesn't need to be the best kept secret that isn't a secret.



"Virtual challenges are a great way to encourage forward momentum in our current situation." (Amy, We Are Invictus member)

"The experience way life changing, to achieve what we did in brining 6 strangers and forming the most amazing team to achieve the goal." (Dave, We are Invictus member)

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What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We employ a veteran to break down the beneficiaries barriers due to shared experiences.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

The number of veterans that are facing challenges both physically and mentally.



Thank you so much Bridgend Carers and Alan Smilies. Not only have you supported our Hub but also our family personally since's illness last year and we are forever grateful xx
(Veteran Service User)

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Developing a network to reduce isolation in the LGBT+ veterans community

Enabling LGBT+ veterans to have pride in their service for the Armed Forces

Nationwide

LGBT+ veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We have arranged long group breaks with our veterans so they have time to open up and realise that they are in a safe space.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

That heterosexual people are also part of our project, we are working with some that were incorrectly removed and we are proud to have them with us.



"My belief, self esteem and confidence have taken a hit over the years, my world has diminished and my social circle is non existent. Being so warmly welcomed by complete strangers was somewhat overwhelming. For the first time in a long time I felt that my opinion counted and I felt valued. I'm looking again at my future in a different light."
(FWP Snowdonia Attendee)

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Digital and telephone outreach Scotland

Removing social barriers for rurally isolated veterans via telephone social prescription

Scotland

Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Ensuring digital mental health resources are available around the clock.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

Setting up for this project took longer than expected/required.



"Even if horses are not your thing , I believe everyone should experience horseback UK , it's life changing . Vron I would not have had this opportunity had it not been for your support , thank you so very much." (Service user feedback)

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What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We work in partnership with multiple local organisations which helps us to identify and support more lonely veterans.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

People want support but sometimes struggle to access it until it's too late and they have found themselves in a clinical environment.



"This has been the happiest I have seen them both in a long time. Gary was talking about getting himself a surfboard. Gary and Arran struggle due to Arran's Learning Difficulties and they have been back to the veterans surfing every week. Thank you for your support."
(The wife of a Veteran Connect service user)

99

Wakefield Veterans

Reaching out to hard to find isolated veterans who have not accessed support before

Yorkshire and the Humber

Older veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We have a variety of events and programmes so we can identify and treat the cause of loneliness or social isolation.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

That many people don't know they are classed as Veterans, especially in the case of Widows and they don't know support is open to them.



"It's good to know I can go to the Breakfast club and know that someone is there that I can talk to" (Ted, service user)

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Stronger Together - Never Alone

Supporting isolated veteran to access services that build their resilience

Midlands

Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We find the veterans the support services that are bespoke to them so they don't have to make that step alone.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

The breadth of organisations that we can utilise to reach out to these vulnerable veterans



“Lee has been positive and given me a sense of belonging in the community with activities. Been great help with all my problems and went above and beyond. He’s been better than my mental health link worker. Easy to talk to about anything”
(Stronger Together service user)

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Positive Futures

Utilising the therapeutic benefits of the great outdoors to improve veterans wellbeing and break the cycle of loneliness.

Scotland

Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We invite veterans who have had similar life experiences into a supportive wilderness environment where they can develop skills to transition into civilian life.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

That there are so many ex forces men and women suffering silently with feelings of loneliness.



“On the wilderness journeys, we worked as a team and we had each other’s back. We were there for each other. This helped boost my confidence and want to make connections with new people again, for the first time in a long time” (Positive Futures service user)

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Navigating Out of Loneliness

Signposting isolated veterans to the support services that they need

Wales

Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We reach out to lonely veterans in areas which we know they go to like supermarkets so they don't have to make that step to reach out to us.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

That a lack of public transport has been an issue for rurally isolated veterans to get involved.



"Omg that is absolutely amazing. Thank you so much I am completely overwhelmed by your kindness. Please pass on my heartfelt thanks for all your help. Thank you. I feel safer already. I even slept through last night!" (NOL service user thanking us and the Armed Forces Bikers for installing a CCTV system at his housing association home.)

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At Ease

Providing constant companionship for incarcerated veterans through an entertaining and informative radio show

National

Incarcerated veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Our shows are hosted by ex-forces personnel who have been in prison so our listeners can relate to their experiences which helps to ease loneliness.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

That some ex-Forces personnel in prison worry they'll put themselves in danger if they declare their status as a 'veteran' on arrival to prison.



"To my family, I must say how sorry I am. I'm in and out, in and out. I'm ex-army, I'm suffering with PTSD and I'm letting everyone down. I just want to say how sorry I am to my family." (Call in from a listener of PRA)

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STAND TO CONNECT

Reintroducing lonely veterans to the camaraderie often missed from service

NW
England

Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We take the process step by step so the veteran doesn't get overwhelmed - starting with calls and a buddy meet up before progressing to activities and group meet ups.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

Don't be pushy! Let the veteran become accustomed to re-connecting!



"Talking to people who have gone through some of the same issues as myself helps me to know that I can do it even though it's hard". (Stand To - Connect service user)

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By Your Side

Promoting community integration for families at RAF Marham

East Anglia

Serving families

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Our peer mentoring and support is all confidential so we can build trust and social confidence.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

We underestimated the challenges of embedding our service within the community and targeting our service at the families who needed support during the pandemic.



“The baby weigh sessions set up by Home-Start Norfolk have been brilliant. I've chatted with other new parents and received support from their friendly team. It's really helped me cope”
(By Your Side, service user)

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Linking Veterans Together

Connecting older veterans to one another and their wider communities through support services

Midlands

Older veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We have recently set up a digital support class which has increased their independence and reduced feelings of isolation.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

A veteran's confidence is often more of an issue than an individual's capabilities



“A recent photo from one of our digital support classes for the veterans, which the veterans have all enjoyed and have gained great skills from” (Louise Potter)

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Tackling loneliness - VC Gallery

Offering daily Naafi breaks where veterans can come in for a brew and a chat

Wales

Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

The veteran is in control of what they do at the VC gallery. They can get fully involved in a project or just come in for a chat.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

I am more aware of the variety of needs of our community members. Some needs are easily identified, others are harder to discover.



"The VC Gallery has given me a purpose in life again. Being a volunteer now has given me the chance to help other people and talk about our problems or just have a cuppa together". (VC Gallery Service User)

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Developing a place where everybody can come together in unity

SE
England

Gurkha
veterans
and
families

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Our centre is a space of open communication so veterans can tell us exactly what services and support they need so we can create it.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out?

The more you work with different cultures the more you realise that you have to learn.



“We have waited so long for a place of our own, we are all so grateful this has happened at last, we can all be together with of friends and not be lonely”. (Member of the community centre)

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Project Semaphore

Bringing family, friends and military associations closer to older veterans through technology

Nationwide

Navy Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We set aside time for veterans to have training and support to use their new Ipad.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

How much of a benefit an Ipad has to keeping veterans connected to friends, family and old shipmates.



"Glynne served on HMS Newfoundland and his Son often prints information about the ship from the Internet to share with his Dad. Glynne is so excited (in fact overwhelmed) that he can use his iPad to find more details and pictures of the ship and maybe reconnect with some old Shipmates...Glynne is 92 years old!" (Feedback on project semaphore)

99

Back From Beyond

Using our in house services to identify lonely veterans and signposting them into our services and events

NW
England

Older
veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Our events allow veterans to meet other veterans which we encourages them to attend again, open up more and reminisce.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

Veterans are more open and willing to discuss things when talking to another veteran - peer to peer.



The help we have received from the Back from Beyond project has improved the quality of our lives significantly. They've helped us do a benefits check, taken us to the local shops and even driven us at short notice to the hospital, to top it all off my wife and I are receiving a free frozen christmas lunch. We are so grateful for their support (Beneficiary couple)

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What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Our staff are always there for our service users with a listening ear, so veterans always feel supported and valued.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

The difficulty of sustaining interest during the week's between our project. People often leave in a good mood, but then need a reassuring call in between which we had not foreseen.



“Brooke house staff always meet with me and going for a walk to talk after fishing was really helpful I don't always need to but it is great to know she is there if I do need extra help” (Service user on the fishing programme expressing the great work of Brooke House's staff)

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Connecting Young Adult Service Children

Connecting post-16 service children to a community of peers with similar backgrounds and experiences

Nationwide

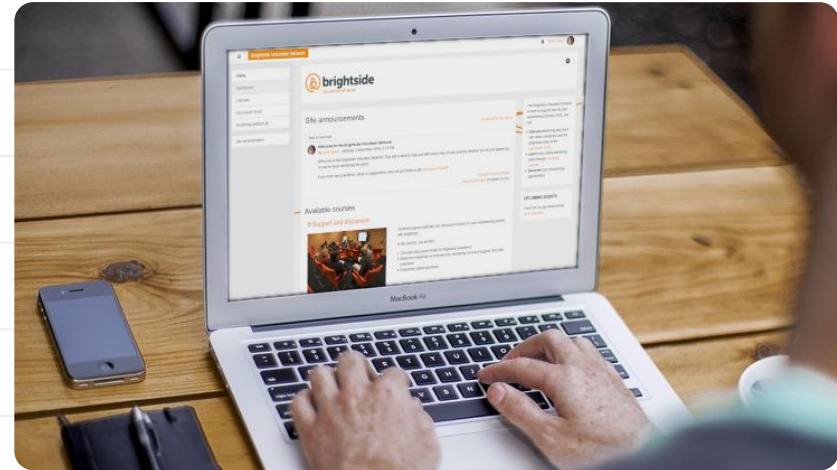
Young people

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Our service is online so that young adults in areas with small numbers of service children can finally meet people they can relate to.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

There is no mechanism for monitoring service children at this stage of their education so we have had to try a lot harder to find service users and engage with them.



“This is a photograph of our virtual platform run in partnership with the Brightside trust that the young adult’s will soon have access to.” (Rachel, University of Winchester)



Something for Everyone

Creating opportunities for people to meet on RAF Wittering base

SE
England

Serving
personnell

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Providing different types of social activities so that everyone on base can get involved and feel less lonely.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

How resilient people can be even when experiencing loneliness.



Blind Veterans UK National Creative Project

Delivering craft project to veterans via the phone or post

Nationwide

Older veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Veterans from all over the country can join small phone and video chats for their ongoing craft projects, which makes them feel more connected.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

How big of an impact receiving and taking part in just one simple project through the post could have on a veterans wellbeing.



"The project has shown me ways to adapt so that I can continue to do the gardening I enjoy." (Majorie, Blind Veteran)

"Painting has been a great for me during lockdown, I live on my own and this has given me something to focus on." (Lewis, Blind Veterans)

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What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We are bringing together members of the AFC from all ages which has fostered unique bonds and a chance for them to learn from one another.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

It has been harder than we thought to ensure that everyone who came down on day one stays throughout the project.



It doesn't matter if gardening is not your thing... It gives you time and space to work out what your thing is. (Plot to Plate service user)

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Project Connect

Providing tablets for socially isolated veterans to lead healthier and more fulfilled lives

NE
England

Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We make the tablets bespoke to the person so they can access the right services and support for them.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

How effective technology and digital training can be in improving a veterans life.



"I have been getting used to using the tablet for a few weeks now. I particularly like the email system as I can contact people directly instead of waiting on the phone for hours." (Albert, Veterans in Crisis service user)

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Veterans Sensory Aid

Supporting veterans experiencing hearing and sight loss to be better understood by friends, family and their community

NW
England

Veterans
with
sensory
loss

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Our approach is to improve societal awareness of hearing and sight loss so that our veterans feel better understood and less lonely.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

This is our first project which is targeted to support veterans and we have felt very welcome as a new 'partner' to the wider veterans community.



"The Armed Forces Community Support Hub' in Warrington was a great venue for the Deaf Awareness Workshop. It's a familiar place for Veterans to just drop in, have a cuppa and a chat. I'm a Veteran who wears hearing aids and a qualified lip reading teacher - it's great to be part of the 'Sensory Aid! Project". (Tom, Veterans Sensory Aid service user)

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Building Communities and Confidence

Empowering members of the AFC to connect with like minded people and to focus on achieving goals

Nationwide

Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We provide veterans with the tools and techniques to manage their emotions and take back control of their lives.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

We are starting to see a greater need to support women who are struggling with issues within their relationships.



"I just want to say a final THANK YOU to all at the programme, you will never know how much it has changed us and how much we appreciate your help in what is a difficult time in our lives. Please, please, keep doing what you do, it makes a massive difference and we need this kind of support and help." (Anne, service user)

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What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We help veterans to create the support network that they had during their time in the military but in a civilian environment.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

Every client is different and must be treated on a case by case basis. Although we are working with ex service personnel, each individual has different priorities and aspirations.



“Thanks to WWTW providing access to social and meaningful opportunities. I now feel that I have got my old self back. I am thankful for the support that I have received.” (Care Coordinator service user)

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Supporting veterans emotionally through a volunteer Buddy Program and signposting to other services

Wales

Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

We are working with other organisations so we can signpost beneficiaries into services that they didn't know existed.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

The focus at this point has been networking. There are a lot more charities and organisations in the area working with veterans than I realised.



“Our first networking event with veterans charities in North and Mid Wales which was very successful and we hope to join more”
(Sarah, Help for Heroes)

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Addressing Social Isolation Among Elderly Gurkha veterans

Helping vulnerable, elderly Gurkha veterans to meet other Gurkha veterans and helping them to get welfare support

SE
England

Gurkha
veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Being approachable and accessible to those with English language difficulties.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

The scale of loneliness and support needed (welfare support) within the Gurkha veteran community - it's huge



"Through this programme we have come together, developed our network and helped one another .. The team is there when we need some help - we visited the seaside last summer, and we are organising veterans' social activities. We thank CAN International, their team and the funders very much for supporting our Gurkha veteran community" (Veteran, service user)

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Sunny Spells and Scattered Showers

Spreading positive mental health messaging to reach out to isolated veterans

Northern
Ireland

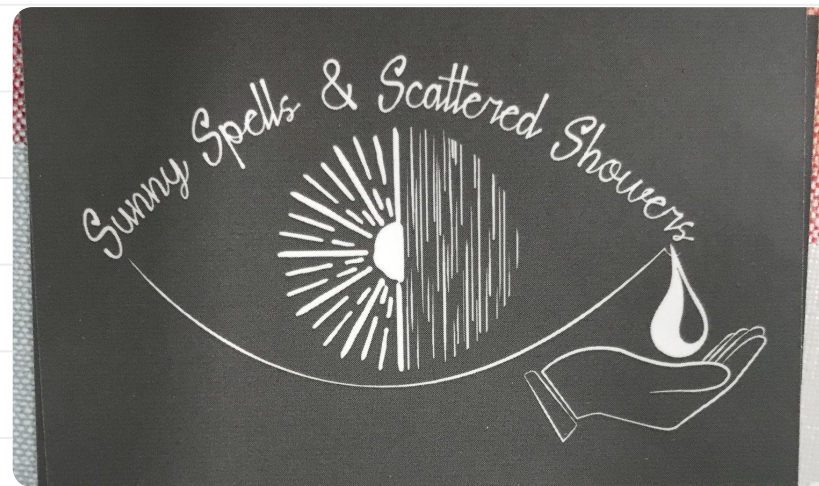
Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique
you're doing to engage lonely
people?

We spread our message out on the ground in the
community so lonely veterans do not have to come to
us.

What is the one thing that you know
now that you didn't know when you
started out on this?

The extent of to which loneliness really affects the
mental health and emotionally stability of our veterans.



We have recently been to the Winter Fair at the Balmoral Show in November in which Vera Lynne was a guest. The event was a great success for us with her causing quite a stir ... we heard lots of unique and interesting recollections from many who stopped with us and shared a cuppa (Shirley, project manager)

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RBL Network for Carers

Establishing a national network of face-to-face and virtual social groups for carers in the Armed Forces community

Nationwide

Veteran carers and cared for veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Creating peer to peer social grounds of people in the same situations helps them to share experiences, build friendships and reduce loneliness.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

How challenging being an unpaid carer is. Our research found that being a carer has a detrimental impact on their physical and mental health.



ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

Hidden Faces

Inviting isolated veterans to become part of a caring 'band of brothers' that is our community

Rotherham
and
Yorkshire

Veterans

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Our project is only open to veterans as veterans know veterans better than anyone.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

We have been able to identify the pockets of need in Rotherham and the best way to reach out to lonely veterans.



SSAFA Community Connection Champions

Training Community Connection Champions at 8 pilot sites to engage the serving community in activities and events

Nationwide

Serving
personnel

What's the most brilliant technique you're doing to engage lonely people?

Community Connections Champions will be from the local serving community so they will understand the needs of the community.

What is the one thing that you know now that you didn't know when you started out on this?

We will be using alternative positive language to talk about loneliness so that our service users do not feel stigmatised.

The SSAFA logo features the lowercase letters 'ssafa' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Below the text is a horizontal bar divided into three equal segments of blue, red, and blue.

We still have 16 impactful projects to share on the impact that they are having on tackling loneliness

